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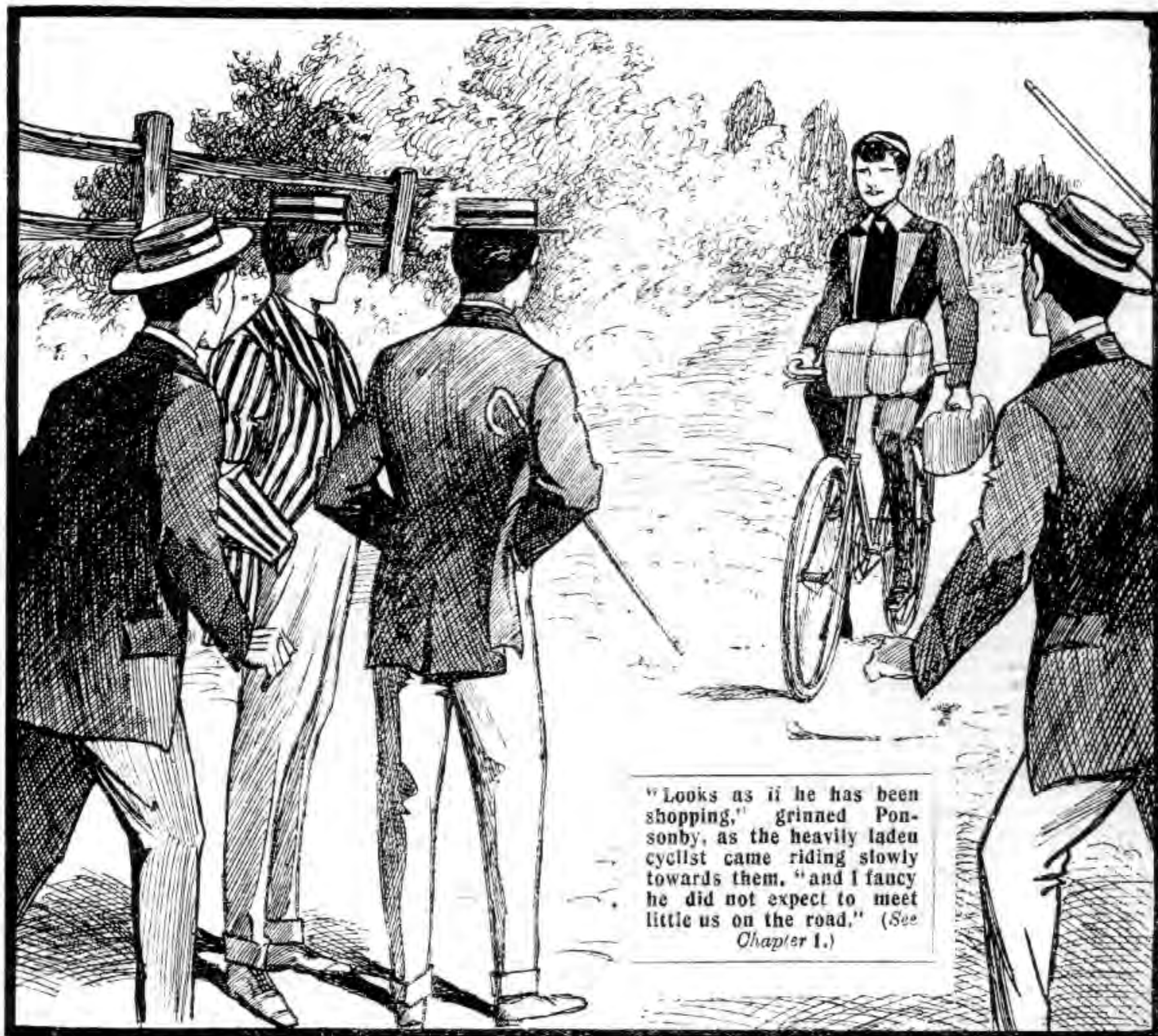


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THE MYSTERIOUS Mr. MOBBS!

A New, Long, Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



"Looks as if he has been shopping," grinned Ponsonby, as the heavily laden cyclist came riding slowly towards them. "and I fancy he did not expect to meet little us on the road." (See Chapter I.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

In the Hands of the Philistines!

"HERE comes the giddy victim!"

Four juniors halted on the white, dusty road that ran from Courtfield to Greyfriars School. The four were Ponsonby & Co. of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe.

The four grinned as they looked along the road. From the direction of Courtfield a cyclist was coming, and from a distance the Highcliffians recognised the Greyfriars cap

he wore. As he came nearer they recognised his face as that of Wibley, of the Greyfriars Remove.

The cyclist was heavily laden. He had two bundles tied on his bike—one fore and one aft, so to speak—and he had another bundle in his hand. He rode with the other hand on the handlebars, and he was riding slowly.

"Looks as if he's been shopping," grinned Ponsonby: "and I fancy he did not expect to meet little us on the road!"

"What on earth can he have in those bundles?" said

Gadsby. "Can't be tuck—a consignment of that extent!"
"We'll see soon," remarked Ponsonby. "Don't let him get by."

"No fear!"

"Absolutely!" chuckled Vavasour.

The four Highcliffe fellows strung themselves out across the road. The heavily-laden cyclist was not likely to get by easily.

They grinned as they watched him. Ponsonby & Co. were on fighting terms with the Greyfriars Remove, especially with Harry Wharton & Co.—"The Famous Five." Wibley was not a member of that select circle, but he was a Removeite, and the nuts of Highcliffe regarded him as fair game. And as he was alone, and the nuts were four to one, it looked as if they had a very easy thing on hand. Ponsonby was a very cautious general, and he always preferred to have the odds on his side.

Wibley of the Remove came on more slowly as he observed the Highcliffians in the road, evidently intending to stop him. But, making up his mind to make a dash for it, he put on speed as he came closer, and whizzed along as fast as he could with his burden.

"Here, look out!" exclaimed Monson, in alarm. "The beast'll run us down!"

"Stop him!" shouted Ponsonby.

"Catch him with your stick, Pon!"

Ponsonby had a stick with a hooked handle hanging on his arm. He caught it by the end, and made a catch at the cycle with it. Wibley's front wheel was hooked as he rode by, and the bicycle came swinging round. It was a dangerous trick to play, for the rider might have had a very nasty fall, but Ponsonby did not stop to think about that. He had stopped the cyclist, and that was all he cared about.

The stick was wrenched from his hand, but the bike came swinging round, and it curled up. Wibley went spinning into the road, and the machine crashed down on the ground.

Wibley's bundle went flying. The four Highcliffians were upon him before he could gain his feet. The Greyfriars' junior lay dazed in the dust, and Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour promptly collared him, and pinned him there.

"Nailed!" grinned Ponsonby.

"Oh!" gasped Wibley. "Ow! You silly rotters, you might have broken my neck— Yow! Get off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pitch his bike into the ditch," said Gadsby.

"Have those bundles open!"

"Let those bundles alone!" shouted Wibley, in alarm.

Ponsonby opened his penknife, and cut the cord, and tore the bundles open. The Highcliffians stared as the contents came to light.

There were clothes of various kinds, and several beards, moustaches, and wigs, and other articles required in amateur theatricals. They could guess now that Wibley had been shopping at Mr. Lazarus's, in Courtfield, and was taking home supplies for the Remove Dramatic Society. As a matter of fact, Harry Wharton & Co. were planning a new play, and Wibley, who was the best actor in the Remove, and had been elected stage-manager, had been entrusted with the task of obtaining the necessary "props."

Quite a considerable little sum had been expended by Wibley at Mr. Lazarus's shop, and the valuable "properties" represented a good part of the funds of the Remove Dramatic Society. Wibley was justly alarmed as Ponsonby dragged them out into the dust. The Highcliffians never cared how much damage they did when they were on the warpath against their old enemies of Greyfriars.

"Props!" grinned Ponsonby. "My hat! What little game are you Greyfriars duffers playing now, Wibby?"

"You let those things alone!" shouted Wibley. "They're for our new play. I've just laid out three pound ten on them."

"Sheer waste, I fancy," said Ponsonby. "These props won't be much use by the time they get to Greyfriars."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted the nuts.

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"You can tell Wharton I've done this for the licking I owe him, Wibby," grinned Ponsonby.

"I wish Wharton were here," panted Wibley. "You rotters! I'll lick you all myself, one after another, if you'll give me fair-play."

"Jam his head on the ground if he's cheeky, Gaddy."

Bump!

"Yow!" yelled the unfortunate Wibley. "Oh, crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ponsonby picked up the fallen bike, and wheeled it to the deep, flowing ditch by the side of the road, and pitched it in. Wibley watched him with his eyes burning with wrath.

"That's Wharton's bike!" he gasped. "He lent it to me."

"All the better," said Ponsonby. "Why didn't you tell me that before, and I'd have cut the tyres first. However, it will want some cleaning when it's been fished out."

"Pitch him in after it," said Monson.

Ponsonby shook his head.

"No, we'll send him home to Greyfriars on foot, with his properties tied round his neck. The bike can stay there and soak. Yank him up!"

Wibley was jerked to his feet, powerless in the grasp of the four Highcliffe fellows. He knew that he was "in" for a ragging, and he set his teeth to go through it. He cast a longing glance up the road, but there was no sign of any of his schoolfellows. He was quite at the mercy of the nuts of Highcliffe.

"Tie his hands," said Ponsonby.

Wibley struggled furiously, but his hands were drawn together behind him, and tied. His own necktie was dragged off for the purpose.

While three pairs of hands held him, Ponsonby proceeded to tie the "properties" round his neck, draping him all round with them. Wibley's aspect was soon very peculiar, with frock-coats, waistcoats, long trousers, beards, moustaches, and wigs hanging all round him. The Highcliffians yelled with laughter.

"Now duck him," said Ponsonby—"duck the whole lot together!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, you rotters!" panted Wibley.

"Yank him along!"

The chuckling Highcliffians dragged Wibley towards the ditch, resisting as hard as he could. There was a sudden whirl of bicycles on the road, and round the bend came five cyclists at a high speed.

Wibley burst into a yell as he saw them coming.

"Rescue, Greyfriars!"

Harry Wharton & Co. took in the situation at a glance. The five cyclists were Wharton, Bob Cherry, Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh—the Famous Five of the Remove.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Highcliffe cads! Go for 'em!"

"Run!" yelled Vavasour.

And he started. Wibley was instantly released, and the four heroes of Highcliffe ran for their lives.

"Run them down!" rapped out Wharton.

"Ha, ha! You bet!"

Ponsonby & Co. were running their hardest. But it was not much use to run with rapid cyclists after them. The Famous Five swept down on them in a twinkling. They shot ahead of the Highcliffians, and jumped off, letting their bikes run whither they would, and in an instant more, they were piling on Ponsonby & Co. The tables were turned with a vengeance.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Mr. Mobbs is Shocked!

"GOT the cads!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Bring 'em along!"

Ponsonby & Co., struggling feebly in the grasp of the Famous Five, were rushed back to where Wibley was standing. Wibley was grinning now.

"Let us go, you cads!" wailed Vavasour. "We give you best!"



Mr. Mobbs, panting with rage, grasped his umbrella in a warlike manner. "My dear boys, come out at once, and if these—if these boys attempt to molest you, I will chastise them!" he exclaimed. (See Chapter 2.)

"Hold the rotters!" said Wharton. "Where's my bike, Wibley?"

"They've pitched it in the ditch."

"My hat!"

Wharton frowned darkly. It was a dirty trick to damage the bicycle, and not at all according to the laws of war as practised by the Greyfriars fellows.

"Jolly lucky we came along," said Wharton. "I thought we'd come and meet you, and help you carry the things, so I borrowed Squiff's bike, and we came."

"In the nickfulness of time!" remarked Hurree Singh.

"They were going to shove me in the ditch after the bike, with all the props," said Wibley. "The whole lot would have been ruined. I'm jolly glad you came along. Untie my hands, Bob."

"I'll cut it—"

"Don't cut it, ass; it's my necktie!"

Bob Cherry grinned, and untied the necktie. Wibley

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began to remove the adornments Ponsonby had provided him with. The four Highcliffians were looking sullen and apprehensive.

"You've put my bike in the ditch," said Wharton sternly.

"It—it slipped in!" gasped Ponsonby

"Well, now you're going to slip in and get it out."

"Wha-a-at!"

"And buck up, all of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ponsonby & Co. gazed at the ditch in dismay. It was a wide, deep ditch, filled to the brim by a recent rainfall. The bike had completely disappeared under the water, and could not be seen, the water being muddy.

To descend into the ditch and grope in the mud for the bike was a task that was most disagreeable. It meant a thorough ducking.

"Good egg!" grinned Wibley. "They were going to chuck me in. They can see what it's like."

"We—we were only joking!" stammered Gadsby.

"Well, I'm not joking," said Wharton grimly. "Go in for that bike."

"I—I can hook it out with my stick," said Ponsonby.

"You won't! You'll go in for it."

"We shall get muddy and wet!" wailed Vavasour.

"Exactly!" said Wharton. "You'll get in the same state as the bike. That's what I want. It may keep you from playing such a dirty trick another time."

"I—I won't!"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Shove 'em in!" he said.

"Leggo—oh—ah—help—yooop!" spluttered Gadsby, as he went whirling towards the ditch.

Splash!

Gadsby disappeared. Then one after another the Highcliffians went whirling in.

Splash! Splash! Splash!

"Fall in, and follow me!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Four tumbled, streaming heads appeared above the flowing ditch, four pairs of shoulders thick with ooze and slime. The water was nearly four feet deep. Four streaming, furious faces glared at the Greyfriars juniors in the road.

"I'm waiting for that bike," said Wharton.

"Grooooooh!"

"Let us out, you beasts!"

"The bike first."

Ponsonby scrambled desperately out, and Bob Cherry's heavy boot pushed on his chest, and hurled him back again. There was another heavy splash, and a splutter.

"Gerrroooooogh!"

"Oh, dear!" moaned Vavasour. "Think of the state of my clothes! Oh, my word! Lemme out! Oh, oh, oh!"

"Hand out the bike!"

The drenched Highcliffians started with rage. To stoop in the muddy water, and grope four feet down for the unseen bike, was not agreeable. But it was the only way of getting out. Ponsonby had just made up his mind to it, when a figure appeared on the road—a little, skinny man in a tight, black frock-coat and silk hat, with an umbrella in his hand. It was Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe. Ponsonby gave a desperate shout.

"Mr. Mobbs! Help!"

The little Form-master started, and came up in great wonder. His eyes almost started from his head at the sight of the four streaming juniors in the ditch. Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Highcliffe Fourth, was not a severe master to Ponsonby & Co. They were a rich set of fellows, and they had wealthy connections, from whom Mr. Mobbs hoped and expected all sorts of things. Mr. Mobbs was a born toady, and he toadied to Ponsonby & Co. without limit.

To Mr. Mobbs's mind, there was something very like sacrilege in laying rough hands upon the nephew of an earl, and the cousin of a marquis. He was simply horrified at the sight of Ponsonby in the ditch.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. His thin, meagre face was quite pale with horror, and his little skinny beard seemed to bristle with wrath. "What—what is this? Ponsonby, my dear boy—my dear Vavasour—"

"Help us, sir!" spluttered Vavasour.

"We're catching cold," wailed Monson.

"Come out; come out at once from that dreadful ditch!"

Ponsonby & Co. came wading out, but the Famous Five promptly chipped in. They did not want any trouble with Mr. Mobbs, but they did not intend to let Ponsonby & Co. escape.

Splash! Splash!

Mr. Mobbs could scarcely believe his eyes, as the elegant nuts of Highcliffe—no longer elegant, alas!—were hurled back into the ditch under his very eyes.

"Grooooooh!"

"What—what?" shrieked Mr. Mobbs. "You—you young hooligans! You ruffians! You dastards! How dare you?"

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"Keep your wool on, cocky!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "They've shoved a bike of ours in the ditch, and they're in there to fetch it out. And they're not coming out till they've handed it over!"

"Let them get out immediately!"

"Sorry, sir," said Wharton quietly. "We want that bike! They put it in, and it's their own fault!"

"Did you put this young scoundrel's bicycle into the ditch, Ponsonby?"

"No, sir! It fell in!"

"My hat! What a whopper!" ejaculated Wibley.

"Wibley was riding it, sir, and he dismounted so clumsily that it rolled into the ditch," said Ponsonby.

"We came up to offer to help him get it out, and then these cads piled on suddenly."

The Greyfriars juniors stared blankly at Ponsonby. They had always known that that cheerful youth had no particular regard for the truth. But the facility with which he rolled out astounding falsehoods now simply amazed them.

"Great pip!" said Bob Cherry faintly. "Talk about Ananias! He was a fool to this chap!"

"A German Chancellor couldn't keep his end up with Ponsonby," said Johnny Bull.

"Come out, Ponsonby," said Mr. Mobbs. "I believe your statement, of course. It was like you—like your gentlemanly way—to offer assistance to these ungrateful and brutal young ruffians."

"Not so much of that, please, Mr. Mobbs," said Harry Wharton quietly, but with a glint in his eyes. "We don't like being called names like that."

"Silence, you insolent hooligan!"

"Do you want to follow those cads into the ditch, Mr. Mobbs?"

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"Because," said Wharton, between his teeth, "if you call us names again, you'll go in after them!"

"Bob-b-bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Mobbs, aghast. But he did not call the Greyfriars juniors any more names. "You—you—ahem!—I command you to allow these young gentlemen to come out of the ditch at once!"

"When they've handed out my bike; not before."

"I command you!" shouted Mr. Mobbs, drawing himself up to his full height: which was not much more than that of the juniors.

"You can command till you're black in the face," said Johnny Bull. "But it won't make any difference. We don't take orders from you."

Mr. Mobbs panted with rage.

"My dear boys, come out at once, and if these—if these boys attempt to molest you, I will chastise them!" he exclaimed.

And Mr. Mobbs grasped his umbrella in a very warlike manner.

"Keep them in, you chaps," said Wharton coolly. "I'll look after Mobbs."

The captain of the Remove planted himself directly in front of the Highcliffe Form-master. Boy as he was, Harry Wharton could easily have knocked out the little Form-master, if his sense of the fitness of things had allowed him to strike a man so much older than himself. He did not intend to do that, but he intended to keep Mr. Mobbs from interfering.

"Stand aside, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton did not move.

"I shall strike you!" shouted Mr. Mobbs, brandishing his umbrella.

"You had better not, Mr. Mobbs."

But the angry Mr. Mobbs did not listen to the voice of reason. He made a swipe at the captain of the Remove with the umbrella. Wharton caught it in his hand, jerked it away, and tossed it far across the hedge, with a swing of his strong arm.

"B-b-bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Mobbs.

Ponsonby & Co. had made another attempt to scramble out, but the Greyfriars juniors shoved them back without ceremony. There was no escape for the heroes of Highcliffe.

Mr. Mobbs made one more effort. He rushed upon Wharton, and grasped him by the shoulders, and strove

to drag him aside. Wharton grasped him in turn, and held him in a grip of steel.

"B-b-bless my soul!" stuttered Mr. Mobbs.

He had caught a Tartar. Wriggle as he would, he could not escape from the grasp of the sturdy junior. Bob Cherry gave a chirrup of delight.

"Pitch him in!" he yelled.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Trouble Ahead!

HARRY WHARTON did not pitch Mr. Mobbs in. Bob Cherry's excited suggestion passed unheeded. Mr. Mobbs certainly was asking for it, but a certain amount of respect was due to his position, if not to himself.

But Wharton's grasp did not relax. He held Mr. Mobbs back, and the Highcliffe master struggled in vain.

"Release me instantly!" shrieked Mr. Mobbs.

"Are you going to interfere?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Then I shall hold you!"

"Bless my soul! Release me! Good heavens, I—I will not be drawn into a vulgar scuffle with a schoolboy. I will not interfere!"

"Good!"

Wharton released Mr. Mobbs, who staggered away breathlessly. Mr. Mobbs never took any care to keep himself fit, and he was feeling quite breathless and exhausted from that brief contest.

"Ponsonby," he stuttered, "you—you had better hand out the bicycle. You must yield to force, but I will see that justice is done later. I shall proceed to Greyfriars, and complain to Dr. Locke, and this ruffianly insolence will be punished. But for the present——"

Ponsonby & Co. were already groping in the mud for the bike. They had realised that there was no help to be expected from Mr. Mobbs. The Greyfriars juniors were not to be awed by a Form-master—not one of Mr. Mobbs's kind.

With many splashes and gasps and splutters, the Highcliffians succeeded in dragging up the bicycle from the bed of mud into which it had sunk. They pushed it out furiously over the bank.

"There's your rotten bike!" hissed Ponsonby. "Now let us out!"

"You can come out," said Wharton.

He picked up the bike. It was coated with mud, and the cleaning of it would be a long and difficult process. He was greatly inclined to keep the Highcliffians there to clean it on the spot, but he conceded that point. The cads of Highcliffe had been sufficiently punished.

They looked dragged objects as they came out into the road, streaming with water, and squelching mud from their boots.

There was a whiff of extremely unpleasant odour from the mud they had dragged up from the bottom of the ditch.

"Keep your distance, please," said Bob Cherry. "You don't smell nice, Ponsonby. You nuts are always so highly scented."

Ponsonby ground his teeth.

"I'll make you pay for this!" he snarled.

"Bow-wow! Sheer off!"

"They shall be condignly punished," said Mr. Mobbs. "Come with me, my dear boys, and I will let Dr. Voysey see you exactly as you are. Then I shall take a complaint to Dr. Locke at Greyfriars. I shall demand the expulsion of these boys!"

"Bow-wow!" said Bob Cherry.

"Cherry, you—you insolent——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Do you want to go in?"

"I decline to say another word to you, Cherry! Come with me, my dear lads!"

And Mr. Mobbs led his flock away towards Highcliffe.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another, and Bob Cherry whistled softly.

"There's going to be trouble," he remarked.

"The troublefulness will be terrific!" said Hurree Singh. "Mobby will come and worry the honoured Head, and then there will be the lickfulness!"

Wharton knitted his brows.

"Let him complain," he said shortly. "If he does we

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shall explain to the Head, and Dr. Locke will see justice done."

"You never know," murmured Bob. "Headmasters don't look at things as we do. The Head mayn't think we were entitled to send those cads in for the bike."

"Can't be helped."

The juniors scraped down the muddy bike with handfuls of grass, cleaning it sufficiently for Wibley to ride it home.

They did not feel very cheerful as they rode back to Greyfriars.

The unending "scraps" and rows between the juniors of the two schools had sometimes made Dr. Locke very angry, and he was sometimes severe on that subject. He was annoyed whenever Mr. Mobbs came over with a complaint, as was natural, and Mr. Mobbs never lost an opportunity.

Harry Wharton & Co., assuredly, felt justified in handling the cads of Highcliffe as they had done, but there was no telling how the Head would look at it. Dr. Locke did not see eye to eye with the heroes of the Lower Fourth.

But it could not be helped now; neither did they regret their drastic handling of Ponsonby & Co. They had plenty of courage to face the music if trouble was to follow.

That trouble would follow there was little doubt. Ponsonby would do his worst, they knew that, and he had very much influence with his Form-master, and through him with Dr. Voysey, the Head of Highcliffe. There had always been bad blood between Ponsonby and the Famous Five, but the dandy of Highcliffe was more bitter than ever of late, owing to the fact that some of the fellows in his own Form at Highcliffe were on friendly terms with Greyfriars. Frank Courtenay had become captain of the Highcliffe Fourth, and Ponsonby was not of nearly such account there as he had been, and Courtenay had revived the cricket fixture with Greyfriars, and generally did his best to make the rival juniors pull together. Against anything of that kind Ponsonby & Co. had set their faces very determinedly.

Harry Wharton & Co. reached Greyfriars, and wheeled in their machines, and for some time afterwards they were busy in cleaning Wharton's bike. Then they went in to tea in No. 1 Study.

A good many members of the Remove were waiting for them there. It was a meeting of the Remove Dramatic Society in No. 1 Study at tea-time.

"Got the props?" asked Peter Todd.

"Yes, they had a narrow escape," said Wharton. "We'll have them out after tea."

The Removites breathed indignation at the story of Ponsonby's raid. The narrow escape of the "props" angered them. Three pounds ten shillings was a considerable sum to the Remove Dramatic Society.

"The rotters!" said Squiff, the Australian junior. "But, I say, if you checked Mobby like that he's bound to come over about it."

"The Head will be in a wax," remarked Mark Linley.

"Can't be helped."

"Mobby will pitch him a yarn," said Vernon-Smith. "He'll make out that Ponsonby & Co. were innocent little doves. You can't prove that they were going to duck Wib, as they didn't have time to duck him, and you can't deny that you did duck them. Looks like a licking."

"If we get licked we'll pass it on to Ponsonby later, I know that!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, blow Ponsonby and Mobby, and all Highcliffe!" said Wibley. "Let's see about the props. I'm going to try my Mobby rig."

Tea being cleared away, the amateur actors proceeded to examine the "props," newly purchased by their stage-manager and utility man. Wibley stripped off his Etons, and donned a black frock-coat and black trousers, a high collar, and a black tie. The juniors grinned as they watched him proceed to make up his face before the glass.

Before Wibley had come to Greyfriars Harry Wharton had been the leading spirit of the junior theatrical

society. But Wharton had cheerfully and willingly yielded first place to Wibley.

Wibley was a born actor. His gift of impersonation was wonderful. He was not exactly a handsome youth, but his face was very useful for theatricals, for he had the gift of twisting it into almost any expression he liked, and when he made himself up he owed more to his mobile features than to grease-paint or disguise.

The latest play designed by the Remove players was a comedy dealing with a public school, and a Form-master had to appear in it—a comic Form-master, whose business was to supply the funny turn. Wibley had had the brilliant idea of caricaturing Mr. Mobbs, of Highcliffe. As Wibley remarked, Nature must have intended Mr. Mobbs as a standing joke, to judge by his looks. With elevators in his boots, Wibley easily made himself the same height as the little Mr. Mobbs. With a few skilful touches to his face, and his queer command of his features, he turned himself into the very likeness of the Highcliffe Form-master.

He had Mr. Mobbs's hollow cheeks, his heavy brows, his tight mouth, his straggling wisp of beard, his high cheek-bones—every detail was perfect when he had finished his make-up—and the juniors looked on with great admiration. They could almost have believed that Mr. Mobbs himself was standing before them.

"Blessed if I know how he does it!" said Bob Cherry. "It's ripping, Wibby. Mr. Knobbs will be a top-hole part."

"Might have some of the Highcliffe chaps over to see it," grinned Squiff. "They'll recognise Mr. Knobbs in the comedy as Mr. Mobbs of real life."

"My dear boy," said Wibley, in the somewhat squeaky voice of Mr. Mobbs, "how is your honoured father? I trust you remembered me to his lordship—what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Topping!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "It's Mobby to the life."

"There'd be a row if he knew we were borrowing his good looks for our comedy," grinned Tom Brown.

"Oh, he's fair game," said Wibley. "A man shouldn't have a face like that if he doesn't want it imitated."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The door opened, and Billy Bunter's fat face and big glasses glimmered in. The Owl of the Remove was grinning.

"I say, you fellows, he's come! Why—what——" Bunter staggered as he blinked at the disguised Wibley.

"Oh, dear! I—I—I—how did he get here?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's Wib, you fathead," said Johnny Bull.

Bunter gasped.

"Oh, dear! You gave me such a turn, Wibley, you thumping idiot! I've just seen Mobby in the Close, and when I saw you here——"

"Mobby here?"

"Better get those things off, Wib," said Wharton, hastily. "We shall all be wanted in the Head's study pretty soon."

"What-ho!"

And Wibley stripped off his disguise rapidly, and resumed his ordinary aspect, in readiness for the expected call to the Head's study.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Ponsonby Declines to Play the Game!

"BY gad, what a merry gang!"

De Courcy of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe, otherwise known as the Caterpillar, made that remark as he elevated his eyebrows in lazy surprise.

Frank Courtenay, who was chatting with the Caterpillar in the Highcliffe quad, stared at the "merry" party that came in at the gates.

It was in a sarcastic spirit that the Caterpillar characterised them as merry. They did not look very merry.

Mr. Mobbs, who strode in ahead, was red with anger, and his little eyes were glinting, and his nose, always red, was almost crimson, an effect that excitement had upon him. After him came Ponsonby, and Gadsby, and

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Monson, and Vavasour, dripping with water and reeking with mud.

They squeaked and shuffled unhappily towards the House, followed by curious looks and smiles from all sides.

"Somebody's been lookin' for trouble, and findin' it," yawned the Caterpillar. "Mobby is waxy. Look at his back!"

Courtenay grinned.

"It certainly looks as if there's been trouble," he remarked. "A row with the Greyfriars chaps perhaps."

"And Ponsonby has got wet," said the Caterpillar. "Pon, old man, what has happened? What induced you to spoil your clothes in that dreadful way?"

Ponsonby gritted his teeth and strode on without replying. The other muddy nuts scowled at Courtenay and the Caterpillar, and went on without a word. They were not in a humour to talk to the friends of Harry Wharton and Co. But Mr. Mobbs paused, and answered.

"My dear De Courcy, I am not surprised that you are shocked at this dreadful sight," said Mr. Mobbs. "Ponsonby and his friends have been hurled into a muddy ditch by a band of young ruffians."

"Horrid, sir!" said the Caterpillar, sympathetically. "Did they get into a row with the bargemen?"

"No! The young ruffians belonged to Greyfriars School."

"By gad!"

"They were boys with whom, De Courcy, I am sorry to say, you have been friendly. I trust you will now see the advisability of leaving them severely alone. The same applies to you, Courtenay."

"I suppose poor old Pon didn't provoke them in any way, sir?" said the Caterpillar, urbanely, before Courtenay could reply.

"Not in the least," said Mr. Mobbs. "That adds to the heinousness of their conduct. A Greyfriars boy, one Wibley, had an accident with his bicycle, and Ponsonby ran up to assist him, and was then treated in this outrageous manner."

"Does Ponsonby say so, sir?" exclaimed Frank Courtenay.

"Certainly he does."

"But you did not see it, sir?"

"I did not," said Mr. Mobbs. "But I trust Ponsonby's account implicitly. I have had experience myself of the ruffianly insolence of Wharton and his friends."

"Ponsonby couldn't have told you the facts, sir," said Courtenay. "Wharton wouldn't have treated him like that if he hadn't asked for it."

"That will do, Courtenay," said Mr. Mobbs, frowning. "I am shocked and disgusted to hear you utter a word in defence of those young rascals. I am about to take measures to visit condign punishment upon them. Dr. Voysey will send a very severe complaint to Greyfriars, by me. You should be glad to know that this assault upon your Form-fellows will be severely punished."

"I know that Ponsonby must have asked for it," said Courtenay.

"My dear Franky," said the Caterpillar, "the good Pon was as gentle as a cooing-dove. I'm sure of it. He seems to have allowed himself to be chucked into a ditch without resisting. Could a peaceful chap do more than that?"

"Ponsonby would not deign to grapple with those young ruffians," said Mr. Mobbs. "He had a proper sense of dignity."

"Yaas," said the Caterpillar. "He must have looked awfully dignified in the ditch. I wish I could have seen him there, by gad!"

Mr. Mobbs gave the Caterpillar a sharp look and walked on. He followed the muddy nuts into the House.

"Lucky my uncle's an earl," murmured the Caterpillar. "If Smithson or Jones minor had talked to Mobby like that he'd have got two on each hand. What are you wrinkling your classic brow for, Franky?"

Courtenay frowned.

"I don't know the rights of this," he said. "But I know Pon has lied, and I'm pretty sure Mobbs knows he's lied, only he's glad to have a handle against the Greyfriars chaps."

"Yaas, that's a cert. He knows that Pon wasn't

brought up on the lines of the lamented George Washington," assented the Caterpillar.

"Now he's going over to Greyfriars complaining," said Courtenay, with a gleam in his eyes. "It's sickening. It makes us all look cads and funks. The Greyfriars chaps never complain to a master. Pon's played them a lot of dirty tricks, and they take it quietly, and never make a row to drag the masters into it. It's up against Highcliffe, the way Pon drags Mobby into his rows."

"Yaas, the noble Pon isn't very particular."

"It ought to be stopped. I know very well he asked for it before he got it, and he ought to have grit enough to take it without whining."

"That's not our good Pon's way."

"Those fellows may get licked for this."

"Yaas; that's Pon's little game."

Courtenay bit his lip.

"And the Greyfriars fellows will think we're all a crowd of sneaks," he said. "I think those rotters might consider our good name a little."

The Caterpillar shrugged his shoulders.

"Come on!" said Courtenay suddenly.

"Whither, my lord?"

"Let's go and see Ponsonby. If we put it to him plain he may do the decent thing."

"Certainly!" said the Caterpillar urbanely. "Let's go and talk to him. It would be awf'ly interestin' to see Ponsonby do anything decent. I haven't much faith in it, but we'll try."

Ponsonby & Co. were in the Fourth-Form dormitory, cleaning themselves and changing their clothes. Drury and Merton and Tunstall, and several more of the noble society of nuts, were there with them, sympathising. The four muddy heroes were in vile tempers, their only solace being the prospect of the punishment that was to fall upon their enemies at Greyfriars.

They stared angrily at the Caterpillar and Courtenay as the two chums came in. The Caterpillar was smiling blandly, with his usual imperturbable humour, but Frank Courtenay looked troubled and somewhat "ratty."

"What do you want, confound you?" exclaimed Ponsonby.

"Just a word with you!" said Courtenay. "You've had some trouble with Wharton it seems——"

"And he's going to get some soon," snarled Ponsonby.

"You mean that Mobby is going over to Greyfriars, complaining as usual?"

"Yes."

"Doesn't it strike you as being jolly mean to get them a licking? They never play that kind of thing on you."

"Mobby wouldn't lick us if they did," said Gadsby.

"It's sneaking," said Courtenay.

"Have you come here to tell us that?" sneered Ponsonby. "Well, I'll tell you in return that we're going to get them the worst licking we can, a flogging very likely."

"You know what they think of us for this kind of meanness and sneaking?" said Courtenay hotly. "If you asked Mobby, he'd let the matter drop."

"Catch me!"

"Why not be a man for once? You've got the worst of it this time; but you can go for the Greyfriars chaps yourselves if you want to get even. Leave Mobby out of it entirely, and don't sneak."

"Mind your own business, Courtenay!" said Ponsonby savagely. "I'm not asking for advice from you."

"Franky is a good hand at advisin'," said the Caterpillar. "He gives me lots of valuable advice. You can't do better than take his tip, Pon. Do be a decent chap for once."

"Go and eat coke!"

The Caterpillar sighed.

"You see how it is, Franky. Pon is too dignified to lick those cheeky Greyfriars chaps, that's where it is."

Some of the nuts grinned at this remark, and Ponsonby scowled. Courtenay compressed his lips, and strode out of the dormitory, and the Caterpillar lounged after him, with his hands in his pockets.

"It's rotten!" growled Courtenay, as they went downstairs. "It's caddish!"

"Can't be helped, my son. Let's go and have tea."

Courtenay's face was gloomy at the tea-table in No. 3 Study. He felt keenly the humiliation that was brought upon the Form and the school by Ponsonby's methods of "getting his own back" upon his rivals at

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ONE
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Greyfriars; but, as De Courcy had remarked, Ponsonby was not particular.

A little later, from the study window, they saw the meagre figure of Mr. Mobbs crossing towards the gates. After an interview with Dr. Voysey, the Fourth Form-master was on his way to Greyfriars. Courtenay clenched his hands as he saw him go.

"I've a jolly good mind to give Ponsonby a thundering good hiding!" he said.

"I dare say Wharton will give him one," said the Caterpillar comfortingly. "It's rotten, but it can't be helped. Come and help me with my beastly 'Virgil.'"

But the cloud did not leave Courtenay's brow. He was wondering what was going on at Greyfriars, and it worried him.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Going Through It!

MR. MOBBS was shown into the Head's study at Greyfriars.

Dr. Locke received him with his usual courtesy, though he sighed a little when Mr. Mobbs was announced. Dr. Locke did not like Mr. Mobbs, and he did not like listening to complaints.

"Pray take a seat, Mr. Mobbs," said the Head. "I am—ahem!—glad to see you. I trust there has been no more friction—ahem!—between the boys."

"I should not have called otherwise, sir," said Mr. Mobbs disagreeably, his eyes glinting through his glasses. "I have a very serious complaint to make."

"Dear me!"

"Several boys in my Form at Highcliffe have been brutally assaulted and hurled into a muddy ditch by certain boys belonging to this school, one of whom treated me—me—with personal violence."

"Is it possible?"

"If you will send for the boys, Dr. Locke, I will make my statement in their presence. They will not, I venture to think, deny it."

"Their names, please?"

"Wharton, Nugent, Cherry, Bull, Wibley, and the Indian boy."

Dr. Locke rang, and sent Trotter for Wharton, Nugent, Cherry, Bull, Wibley, and the Indian boy. Those youths were expecting the summons, and they came at once to the Head's study.

The Head looked at the six juniors as they filed in. Mr. Mobbs regarded them with angry animosity.

"These are the boys, Dr. Locke," he said. "It was Wharton who assaulted me. All of them were parties to the assault upon Ponsonby and his friends. I will tell you exactly what occurred. The boy Wibley had an accident with his bicycle——"

"I didn't sir," said Wibley promptly.

"Let Mr. Mobbs finish, please!" said Dr. Locke.

"Very well, sir."

"Wibley had an accident with his bicycle, which slipped into a ditch. Ponsonby and his friends, seeing the mishap, came up to render assistance. These other boys then arrived upon the spot and assaulted them. Taking a cowardly advantage of being in greater numbers, they threw Ponsonby, Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour into the ditch, drenching them and covering them with mud. I came up, and Wharton seized me in a ruffianly manner and prevented me from going to their aid. They kept my boys in the ditch for some time before allowing them to get out. Their clothes are ruined. Wharton hurled my umbrella into the fields, and I have not yet recovered it."

Dr. Locke's brow grew very stern.

"Is that all, Mr. Mobbs?"

"That is all, sir; and enough, too, I think!" snapped Mr. Mobbs.

"What have you to say?" asked the Head, fixing his eyes upon the culprits.

"Only that it isn't true, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"Hardly a word of it, sir," said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

"The untruthfulness is terrific, honoured sahib!"

Mr. Mobbs crimsoned with rage.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"SPORTSMEN ALL!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry
Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Dr. Locke, if you allow these boys to cast doubt upon my statements—"

"I must hear what the boys say in their defence, Mr. Mobbs. Wibley, kindly tell me what happened, in the first place."

"Certainly, sir!" said Wibley. "I was riding home from Courtfield with some things I'd just bought from Lazarus's. The Highcliffe cads—"

"What?"

"I mean, Ponsonby and his set, sir, stopped me, collared me, and pitched Wharton's bike into the ditch. It was Wharton's bike I was riding. Then they were going to pitch me in after it, when these chaps came up and stopped them."

"Mr. Mobbs wasn't there then, sir," said Johnny Bull. "He doesn't know what happened, only from what Ponsonby told him."

"Do you deny that you threw Ponsonby and his friends into the ditch?" asked the Head, looking very worried.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Harry. "We made them go in to fetch my bike out. It was in four feet of water. They wouldn't go in for it, so they were chucked in—I mean, thrown in."

"And we let them come out as soon as they handed the bike out," said Nugent.

"And the esteemed Mr. Mobbs wished to interfere, and Wharton persuaded him not to," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You persuaded him, Wharton?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Mr. Mobbs says that you assaulted him. How did you persuade him?"

"I—ahem!—I held him, sir."

Dr. Locke frowned.

"You laid hands upon Mr. Mobbs, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"That was very wrong. You must know that that was disrespectful, Wharton, to a man of Mr. Mobbs's age and in his position."

Wharton was silent. He did not see that he was to blame, but he felt that the Head must take a different view. For a junior to collar a Form-master and hold him forcibly was not a matter the Head of Greyfriars could approve of, whatever provocation the junior might have received.

"You observe, Mr. Mobbs, that these boys give a different account from that you appear to have received from Ponsonby?"

"I trust Ponsonby's word absolutely, sir."

"I prefer to give credence to my own boys, naturally, especially as I know them to be truthful," said the Head drily. "However, as the occurrence had no witnesses, we will let that pass. Wharton, was there no other method of recovering the bicycle, other than by sending the Highcliffe boys into the ditch to grope for it?"

"Well, yes, sir. I suppose it could have been dragged out with a stick."

"Then why did you put them in the ditch?"

"We thought they deserved it, sir, after pitching the bike in."

Dr. Locke coughed.

"It was a very lawless proceeding, Wharton. Even if Ponsonby threw the bicycle deliberately into the water, that was not so serious a matter as throwing the boys themselves in."

"They were going to pitch Wib in, sir."

"We stopped them just in time," added Johnny Bull. "Wib would have been in the next minute if we hadn't come up."

"That is false!" said Mr. Mobbs.

"It is not false!" exclaimed Wharton indignantly.

"Control yourself, Wharton, please. It appears that the Highcliffe boys did not actually throw Wibley into the ditch, although they threatened to do so?"

"Well, yes."

"As there were other means of recovering the bicycle, I must conclude that you threw those boys into the ditch simply as a punishment?"

"Partly—yes, sir."

"Then it was a most unjustifiable act," said the Head. "Still more unjustifiable was it to use force against a gentleman in Mr. Mobbs's position when he wished to

go to their help. Although Mr. Mobbs does not belong to your school, he is in the same position as your own Form-master, and should have been treated with respect. I cannot possibly excuse this, and so far I regard Mr. Mobbs's complaint as fully justified. If a Greyfriars master should be treated so disrespectfully by Highcliffe boys, I should expect Dr. Voysey to make full reparation."

The juniors were silent. It was the view they had really expected the Head to take, and they could hardly blame him.

"I shall therefore punish you severely," said the Head, taking up his cane. "I believe that the trouble was originally caused by the Highcliffe boys, but when Mr. Mobbs arrived upon the scene you should have obeyed him. I shall therefore cane you all in the presence of Mr. Mobbs!"

Mr. Mobbs rubbed his skinny hands.

He was anticipating a pleasant scene—pleasant for him, though not for the unlucky Removites.

"You first, Wharton!"

Swish! Swish! Swish! Swish!

Harry Wharton took his punishment quietly, only the glint in his eyes betraying his feelings.

One after another, the six juniors took the same punishment, Mr. Mobbs looking on with quite a genial expression now.

Then the Head dismissed them.

"You will report this to Dr. Voysey, Mr. Mobbs. And I may add that I consider it merely just, that Dr. Voysey should punish Ponsonby for having, in the first place, caused the whole trouble."

"Ponsonby's explanation on that point has fully satisfied Dr. Voysey," replied Mr. Mobbs coolly. "There is no call for punishment in his case."

And Mr. Mobbs departed, leaving the Head of Greyfriars frowning.

There was much chuckling among the nuts of Highcliffe when Mr. Mobbs returned, and they learned of the scene in the Head's study at Greyfriars. Ponsonby & Co. felt that they had scored at the finish.

But it was not the finish yet.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Squiff's Schemel

NO. 1 Study in the Remove passage was a scene of woe.

Six juniors, there, were rubbing their hands, growling, grunting, and saying things.

Each of the delinquents had received four cuts, and they had been laid on very hard. Their palms felt, as Bob Cherry expressed it, as if they had been toasted.

Even more bitter than the severe caning, was the feeling that their punishment had been unjust.

They did not blame the Head. He could hardly have taken any other view of the matter than the one he had taken. The chums of the Remove were kind enough to make allowances for the Head, and they excused him.

But they did not excuse Ponsonby or Mr. Mobbs. They had an intense longing to make things warm for the nuts of Highcliffe and their Form-master.

"We don't get a chance against those cads," said Bob Cherry dolorously. "When they get it in the neck, they sneak every time. We could go over to Highcliffe, and give them a licking all round; but it would only mean another licking for us from the Head—perhaps a flogging next time."

Wharton's eyes glittered.

"All the same, we're going to make those cads smart for this!" he exclaimed.

"Hear, hear!" said Nugent feebly.

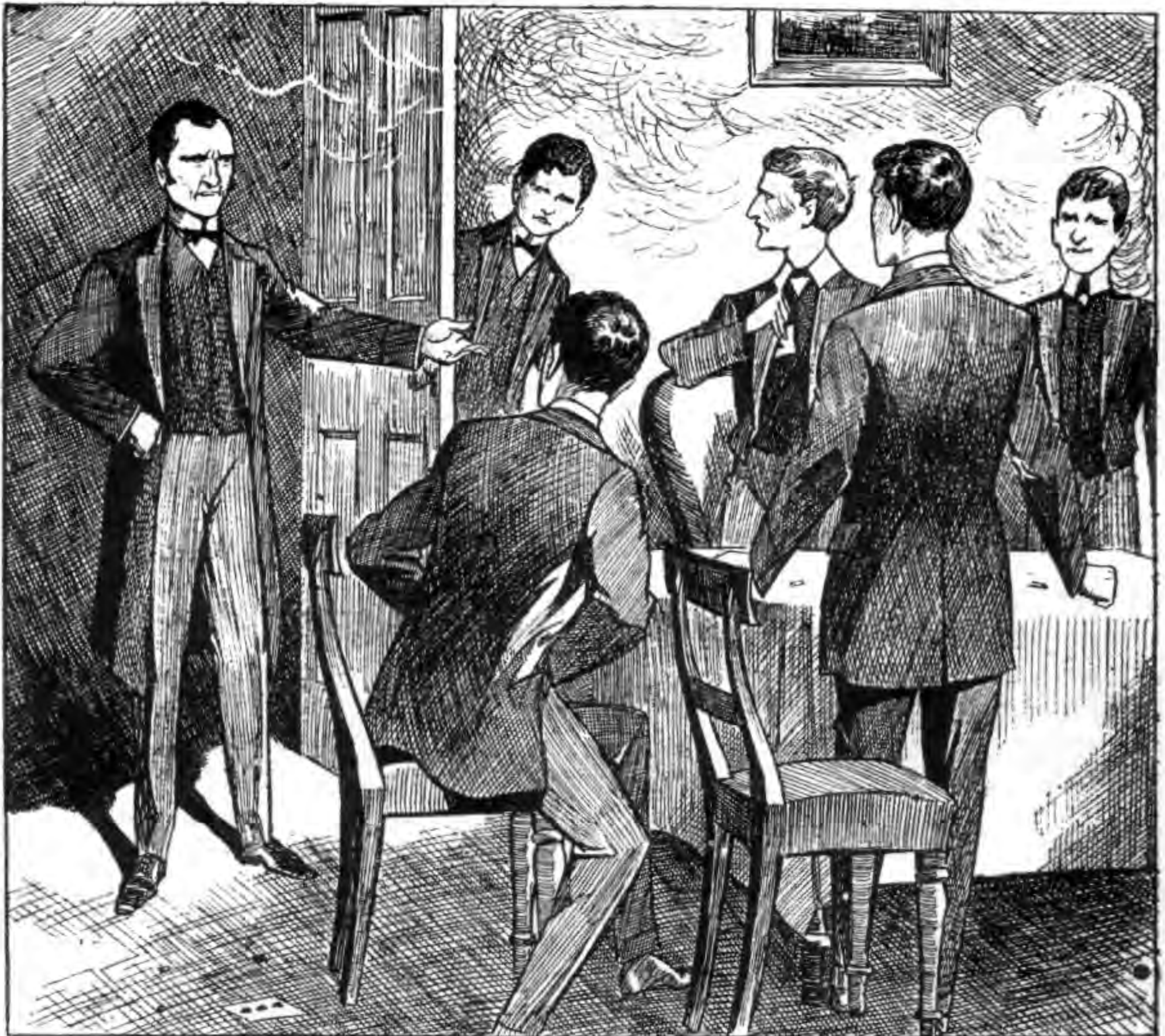
"The hear-hearfulness is terrific; but the painfulness in my esteemed hands is also great," remarked Hurree Singh sadly.

"Wow-wow-wow-wow!" That was Wibley's contribution to the discussion.

"You can't deal with rotters who don't play the game," said Johnny Bull. "We never sneak about them. They sneak all the time. Yow-ow!"

"Wow-ow-ow!" said Wibley.

Harry Wharton wrinkled his brows angrily. He was



"Disgraceful!" hooted Mr. Mobbs. "Shocking! Are you aware that you may be expelled from the school for this rascally conduct? It is my duty to report this to Dr. Voysey." Ponsonby gritted his teeth. (See Chapter 13.)

simply yearning to make Ponsonby & Co. suffer for their sins. But the prospect of another licking from the Head was not agreeable.

Squiff looked into the study. Sampson Quincy Ifley Field was very sympathetic.

"Been through it?" he asked.

"Yow! Yes."

"Poor old Wib! You look doubled up!" said the Australian junior.

Wibley groaned.

"Wib isn't so tough as we are," grinned Bob Cherry. "You'll get hardened when you've been in the Remove a bit longer, Wibby."

"Wow!" said Wibley.

"Can't you think of a way of making those rotters sit up, Squiff?" said Nugent. "You did them in the eye once, when you were new here. Can't you think of another wheeze like that?"

The junior from New South Wales grinned. His great jape on the Highcliffe fellows had never been forgotten. When he had been a new-comer at Greyfriars, the Australian junior had presented himself at Highcliffe as a new boy, and played the part for a whole day, much to the discomfort of Ponsonby & Co. But that, as Bob

Cherry observed, was a little game that couldn't be played twice.

"Well, I certainly couldn't go there as a new kid again," grinned Squiff. "But if I had Wib's gift of making up, there's another game I could play—a regular scorcher. But I couldn't do it."

Wibley looked up.

"What is it?" he asked. "Couldn't I do it?"

"Well, it would want a lot of nerve," said Squiff.

Wibley snorted.

"Do you think I haven't as much nerve as you, you—you kangaroo?"

"Bet you you haven't," said Squiff coolly. "You see, we grow a special brand of nerve in New South Wales, and you—"

"Oh, come off!" said Johnny Bull. "What's the idea? If there's anything in it, we'll make Wib do it!"

"I shouldn't want making, fathead!" growled Wibley. "You show me how I can pass this on to Ponsonby, and I'll jump at it."

"Go it, Squiff!" said the Famous Five encouragingly.

The chums of the Remove had great faith in the sagacity of Sampson Quincy Ifley Field.

"Well," said Squiff, "I thought of it, and thought it out; and if I were an actor like Wib, and could wriggle

my features about as he does, I'd go in for it. But I know I couldn't do it. I should be bowled out at once. Wib could do it, if he's got the nerve."

"Oh, rats!" said Wibley. "My nerve's all right. Cut the cackle, and come to the hosses!"

"Well, it came into my head when I was watching you make up as Knobbs, for our comedy," said Squiff.

"What the dickens has our comedy to do with it?" snorted Wibley. "I don't feel very comic just now. Blow the comedy!"

"We planned that comic character in the comedy on the lines of our friend Mobby," pursued Squiff. "You can make yourself up exactly like him."

"Of course I can," said Wibley. "Like his blessed twin. But what are you getting at?"

"Well, that's the idea."

"Blessed if I see it!"

"Make it a bit clearer," said Bob Cherry. "I may be dense, but I don't see the point."

"Yes, you are a bit dense," assented Squiff.

"Why, you silly ass——"

"However, to come to the point, suppose Wib should put on his rig as Mr. Knobbs in the comedy——"

"Well?"

"And instead of playing Mr. Knobbs in our play here, suppose he should go to Highcliffe, and play Mr. Mobbs?"

"What!" howled the juniors.

"That's the wheeze—Wib's got the nerve. I'd do it like a shot, if I could play the part; but I couldn't. It wants a born actor, with an elastic chivvy, like Wib's."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You thumping ass!" roared Wibley. "And what would Mobby say when his double turned up at Highcliffe?"

"He wouldn't say anything."

"Why wouldn't he, fathead?"

"Because he wouldn't be there."

"And why wouldn't he be there?" demanded Bob.

"Because he would be kept away."

"Oh!"

"That would be our part in the little game," explained Squiff. "We could get a tip from Courtenay or the Caterpillar about Mr. Mobbs's personal customs, and nail him some time when he's outside the walls of Highcliffe."

"Great Scott!"

"Kidnap him!" gasped Nugent.

"Well, no; just persuade him to take a little walk, say, to the old priory, and to stay there for the best part of a day," said Squiff.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"But—but—but he'd rush here to the Head at once, as soon as he was let loose!" exclaimed Wharton, aghast. "We might get sacked for it."

"We jolly well should be sacked!" said Bob.

"Yes, if Mobby knew us!" assented Squiff. "But he wouldn't know us. Suppose he goes out after dark—he must do so sometimes—well, he's collared by a gang of footpads with bags over their heads. They rush him off, and tell him they're going to hold him to ransom——"

"My sainted aunt!"

"They shove him into the old priory, and tie him up. They leave him there, thinking the ruffians are going to keep him prisoner till he's ransomed. When it suits us, a Greyfriars chap happens along, finds him, and lets him loose. Not before it suits us for him to be loose, of course."

"Oh, dear! Are there any more at home like you?" gasped Bob Cherry. "You might have the nerve to do it, Squiffy, but Wib——"

"I've got plenty of nerve," said Wibley. "But—but suppose Mobby should get away, and come back to Highcliffe while I was there?"

"He wouldn't."

"He might," said Wibley.

"Well, you'd have to cut for it. But he wouldn't."

"It—it's too thick," said Harry Wharton. "It's a tremendous idea, but—but it is too big an order for Wibby."

"Besides, Wibby's disguise mightn't stand the strain THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 389.

of being seen in the daylight, at close quarters," said Johnny Bull.

Wibley sniffed disdainfully.

"Why, you duffer, I could play Mobby so that Mobby himself wouldn't know whether it was himself or not!" he exclaimed.

"I think Wib could do it," said Squiff. "He'll make up all right. When he's made up as Knobbs for the comedy we might take him for Mobby—Bunter did take him for Mobbs, you know. The question is, whether Wibby could carry out the game at Highcliffe. It would need a lot of nerve."

"I've got nerve enough," growled Wibley. "You leave my nerve alone. If you fellows will undertake to keep Mobby off the grass, I'll undertake to play his part at Highcliffe."

Bob Cherry rubbed his hands.

"What a wheeze! Why you can cane Ponsonby & Co.——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And give 'em lines——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And set 'em all sorts of things to do. I say, Wibby, I suppose you couldn't make me up for the part?" said Bob.

"Fathead! You couldn't do it," said Wibley. "I could do it, and I'll jolly well show you whether I've got nerve enough!"

"Is it a go?" asked Squiff.

And all the juniors replied with one voice: "It's a go!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Not in the Know!

BILLY BUNTER was very curious.

He was on tenterhooks.

There was something on in the Remove, Bunter was certain of that. Knowing that something was on, the Peeping Tom of Greyfriars naturally wanted to know all about it. But, whatever it was, it was being kept very dark.

Bunter was what Bob Cherry called a keyhole expert, but, even with his unusual gifts in that line, he could not get on to the secret. His curiosity was aroused to burning-point. But it was in vain that he asked questions. He questioned Wharton, whose reply was monosyllabic, consisting merely of the word "rats." He asked Johnny Bull, who replied with a grunt. He asked Bob Cherry, who sat him down on the floor of the Remove passage with a terrific bump.

After that, Billy Bunter asked no more questions. But he still wanted to know. Here and there he had caught a word. He had heard Squiff say something to Nugent about "the priory." He had heard Wharton mention that Courtenay would be able to tell them something.

That was the full extent of his information for a time, and he strove in vain to puzzle it out. The old priory was a place for picnics, and the Owl of the Remove could only conclude that the Famous Five were planning an al fresco feed, from which he, William George Bunter, was to be excluded. If there was to be a picnic, Billy Bunter was determined that he would be present—that was a foregone conclusion. He waited quite anxiously for Courtenay to visit Greyfriars again.

When Courtenay dropped in the next day, with the Caterpillar, Billy Bunter contrived to be within hearing distance while they were chatting with the chums of the Remove. But they did not talk about picnics.

Indeed, it seemed to the inquisitive Owl that their conversation was really not worth the trouble of listening to.

Courtenay expressed his regret about the licking the Greyfriars fellows had had, and expressed very forcibly his contempt for Ponsonby's sneaking. Then the talk ran on Mr. Mobbs.

Why the Famous Five cared a button about Mr. Mobbs and his personal habits the Owl of the Remove could not guess. But they evidently did.

They seemed quite interested in Mr. Mobbs. They asked a number of questions about him—exactly where his room was at Highcliffe, about the hours when he took

his Form, and especially about the times when he had his little walks abroad.

Courtenay was considerably puzzled, but he answered the questions, telling all he knew of Mr. Mobbs's manners and customs. Perhaps he suspected that the Famous Five had a rod in pickle for Mr. Mobbs; but if that was the case, Courtenay had no objection to make, so long as he was not wanted to help. He could not very well have taken a hand in ragging his own Form-master, but he could see no reason why the Removites should not avenge their wrongs if they saw fit.

The talk took place in the tuckshop, and Billy Bunter, listening just outside the door, sniffed with annoyance. They were not talking about anything that he wanted to know. The picnic was not mentioned, neither was there the slightest reference to the priory in the wood.

But he heard Bob Cherry chuckle when he mentioned Mr. Mobbs's habit of taking a little constitutional, by his doctor's orders, before breakfast. It appeared that Mr. Mobbs usually walked a quarter of a mile and back again. Wibley was heard to remark, "That's good!" Squiff said, "Topping!"

Billy Bunter gave it up, and strolled away in disgust.

After Courtenay had gone there was a confabulation in No. 1 Study. The Famous Five were there, and Squiff, and Vernon-Smith, and Peter Todd, and Tom Brown. Evidently these youths had been taken into the mysterious secret. Billy Bunter bristled with indignation at being left out of it, and he felt quite justified in applying his ear to the study keyhole.

"Any morning will do," he heard Wharton say. "Of course, Courtenay can't be told till afterwards. We don't want to risk getting him into trouble."

"True, O King!" said Bob Cherry.

"We shall have to miss brekker that morning," said Squiff.

"That will mean lines, but we can stand it," said Nugent.

"But what about Wib? He will want a day's leave. How on earth is Wibley going to get a day's leave?" said Vernon-Smith.

"It's got to be worked somehow," said Wharton.

"Better pick a day that's a half-holiday," said Wibley. "Then it will be only a question of getting a morning off."

"Yes, that's a good idea."

"I can work it," said Wibley. "I'll write to my people and get them to ask the Head to give me next Wednesday a whole day instead of a half. They'll do it, and the Head can't refuse."

"He won't know what you want leave for," chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!" said Bob suddenly.

He stepped quickly to the door, and flung it open. Billy Bunter, taken quite by surprise, rolled headlong into the study.

There was a shout of wrath from the juniors.

"Bunter!"

"The spying cad!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Scrag him!"

"Yow! Ow! I say, you fellows, I wasn't listening," howled Bunter, groping for his spectacles. "I haven't heard a word. I don't know anything about your getting up a picnic."

"A what?" ejaculated Wharton.

Billy Bunter scrambled up, barely dodging Bob Cherry's boot.

"I say, you fellows, I'm coming!"

"Coming! Where?"

"To that picnic," said Bunter, blinking at them. "I'll stand my whack; you needn't be afraid of that. I'm expecting a postal-order next Wednesday."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked angrily at the juniors. It was evident to them that the Owl of the Remove was not on the track. Billy Bunter's thoughts ran naturally upon eating and drinking, and his suspicion was that a feed was being planned.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" growled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I'm coming!"

"Your mistake!" said Peter Todd. "You're not coming—you're going!"

"Yaroooh!"

Bunter went—with Peter's boot behind him. Peter

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dribbled him down the passage to the stairs, and Bunter went down the stairs by himself, without further aid. He rolled down, and ran for his life.

"Jolly narrow escape," said Todd, as he returned to the study. "The fat bounder might have heard the whole thing, and then it would have been all out."

Billy Bunter did not return to the keyhole. He was anxious to keep at a safe distance from No. 1 Study just then, and the confabulation went on without the Owl of the Remove getting any further information. The belief remained fixed in his mind that a picnic was being planned, and to that the chums of the Remove had no objection.

The scheme was schemed and the plot was plotted. Every day Wibley practised the part of Mr. Mobbs, with the door locked, and the juniors had to admit that there was simply no telling him from the real Mr. Mobbs. And Wib's letter to his people had the desired result. His pater asked the Head for a whole holiday for him on the following Wednesday, instead of the usual half, and Dr. Locke consented.

The Head probably supposed that Wibley would be visiting his people that day. It was not judicious to enlighten the Head as to exactly what Wibley would be doing that day. The Head's sense of humour, as Wibley observed, was too limited for that.

Squiff had another excellent idea—he tackled Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, one day when that gentleman was in a specially genial mood, and obtained permission for some of the fellows to see Wibley off on Wednesday morning. Mr. Quelch willingly gave that permission, on the understanding that they were back in time for first lesson. There was no reason why they should not breakfast on sandwiches while seeing Wibley off, if they liked.

Mr. Quelch, naturally, had not the slightest suspicion of where they were seeing Wibley "off" to.

Before Wednesday came round every point had been satisfactorily settled, and every preparation had been made.

The juniors had kindly arranged to handle Mr. Mobbs as gently as possible. But after all the wrongs they had suffered at that gentleman's hands, he could not complain if he was put to some inconvenience, and it would not worry them if he did. If Wibley of the Remove was to play his part for a day at Highcliffe, it was obviously necessary for Mr. Mobbs to disappear for that day. And as Bob Cherry put it, Mobbs had been asking for trouble for a long time. Now he was going to get it.

Many and many were the discussions as to what Wibley would do when he was established at Highcliffe as Mr. Mobbs, master of the Fourth. The juniors chuckled loud and long over those discussions.

Every member of the Co. felt that it was somewhat unfortunate that he, personally, could not be chosen for the part. But it was generally conceded that only Wibley could carry it out. And all Wibley required, in addition to his skill and his acting ability, was plenty of nerve. Wibley declared that his nerve was all right, and his comrades hoped that it was.

When the Remove turned out at the clang of the rising-bell on Wednesday morning, Billy Bunter blinked reproachfully at the Famous Five.

"I know all about it," he announced.

"About which?" asked Bob.

"I know the little game, and I think it's rotten!"

"Go hon!"

"You're going to picnic this afternoon with Wibley's people," said Bunter. "That's what he's asked for leave for. And if Wibley chooses to leave out an old pal I can only say that I'm disgusted!"

And the chums of the Remove, chuckling over Bunter's misapprehension, hurried out of the dormitory, and wheeled out their bicycles—to see Wibley off.

ANSWERS

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"SPORTSMEN ALL!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry
Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Kidnappers!

MR. MOBBS looked a little less sour than usual. The influence of that soft, sweet, balmy summer's morning was not lost, even upon Mr. Mobbs. A gentle breeze from the sea stirred the leaves in the thick green woods as the Highcliffe master walked down the footpath; the rising sun streamed warmth from a sky of cloudless blue.

Mr. Mobbs almost smiled, as all Nature smiled round him. Besides, his thoughts were pleasant. He was going to cane Smithson of the Fourth after breakfast, and he expected a word or two, and perhaps a handshake, from Ponsonby's uncle the earl when that noble gentleman visited Highcliffe a few days later in the week. Mr. Mobbs was looking forward to that visit. If the noble earl honoured him with two fingers to shake Mr. Mobbs's cup of happiness would be full.

The Highcliffe master was thinking of anything but danger. If anyone had warned him that the green, thick wood sheltered ruffianly footpads that soft summer morning he would have laughed at the idea.

But there was danger for Mr. Mobbs in the shady wood. He was getting a nice appetite for his breakfast, but that breakfast was destined never to be eaten. Mr. Mobbs had reached the end of his little walk; his constitutional always took him exactly half a mile. He turned to take breath before he retraced his steps to Highcliffe, and then, like a bolt from the blue, came danger.

Four figures emerged from the thick trees close to him, and directly in his path. Mr. Mobbs gazed at them in utter amazement.

They wore thick, heavy boots, and large, shabby coats that covered them from head to foot, warm as the morning was. But more curious than that was the fact that their heads were covered with large bags, drawn down and tied under the chin. Holes had been cut in the bags for sight and respiration, but of their features not a glimpse could be seen.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Mobbs.

"'Ere 'e is, Bill!" said a deep, hoarse, husky voice, proceeding in muffled tones from under one of the inverted bags.

"That's 'im, Sam!"

"Collar 'im!"

"Got yer pistol, 'andy, Tadger?"

"Wot!"

Those dreadful exclamations almost froze Mr. Mobbs's blood in his veins. He was evidently in the presence of armed and desperate footpads. The four ruffians were no taller than himself, but they were four to one, and Mr. Mobbs never thought of resistance. He was not of the stuff of which heroes are made.

"My—my good fellows—" he stammered.

"Don't you give us no trouble!" hissed the leader of the gang. "We'd carve yer into strips as soon as look at yer ugly mug, savvy?"

"Goodness gracious!"

"Lag 'im!"

The four ruffians closed round Mr. Mobbs and "lagged" him. He trembled like an aspen as their grasp fastened upon his exceedingly slim arms.

"Got 'im!"

"My—my good men," murmured Mr. Mobbs, "I—I have very little money about me, but—but—"

"We ain't arter yer rhino!"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Mobbs, who was very glad to hear it. "Pray what do you want, then?"

"We want you!"

"You—you want me!"

"Yus! You're a prisoner!"

"Goodness gracious!"

"You're goin' to be 'eld to ransom, Dr. Voysey!"

"Dr. Voysey! But I am not Dr. Voysey!" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs, in great agitation. "I am a Form-master at Highcliffe. My name is Mobbs—Eugenio Mobbs!"

"Don't you tell us no bloomin' lies, or you'll git a swipe on the jore!" said the leader of the kidnappers. "We knows yer. We bin watchin' for yer. And somebody's goin' to pay pretty 'igh for you. I reckon the 'Ead of 'Ighcliffe will be a wallyble prisoner!"

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"But—but my good man I am not the Head of Highcliffe!" Even in his alarm and agitation, Mr. Mobbs felt a little flattered at being taken for the Head of Highcliffe. "If you have seen Dr. Voysey—"

"We ain't got no time to jore; we knows you!" said the leader. "Are you comin' quiet, or do you want a rap on the napper?"

"I—I will come quietly!" gasped Mr. Mobbs, casting a wild glance round him. "But I—I assure you—"

"'Old your row!"

Mr. Mobbs shuddered as a thick stick was shaken under his nose. He "held his row" promptly. He was quite at the mercy of the ruffians. They proceeded to tie his hands behind his back, and then he was scientifically gagged with his own handkerchief. Then a thick cloth was drawn over his eyes, and he was securely blindfolded.

The Highcliffe master submitted like a man. A struggle would have been useless against such odds, even if he had been inclined to put up a fight, which was not the case.

Bound and gagged and blindfolded, Mr. Mobbs was hurried away into the wood by his kidnappers.

Whither they were taking him he had not the remotest idea. That the footpads took him for the Head of Highcliffe, that they had kidnapped him to hold him to ransom, was all he knew. His brain was in a whirl. Mr. Mobbs, though really a very tame and timid little gentleman, was accustomed to relating deeds of derring-do in his youthful years, and according to his own account he had been known, in his college days, as "Wild Mobbs," and had been a regular swashbuckler. But his swashbuckling days, if they had ever existed, were over now. Mr. Mobbs was more like a lamb than a swashbuckler in the hands of these desperate outcasts.

He stumbled and trampled on in the midst of his captors, stumbling over roots as he caught his feet in them, his heart thumping with apprehension. Savage grunts from his captors, whenever he stumbled, sent thrills of terror through him, and every moment he half expected to feel a cudgel descending upon his head.

It seemed like an evil dream to him. Was it possible that he—Mr. Mobbs—the quiet and sedate Form-master of Highcliffe, had really been kidnapped in a wood by masked ruffians, to be held to ransom, like a victim of the banditti in the Italian mountains? Surely he would wake up soon, and find himself in his room at Highcliffe!

But it was no dream; it was only too real. With a firm grip on either skinny arm Mr. Mobbs was led away through the wood.

Whither were they taking him? A wood on the English countryside was not precisely like the lonely Italian mountains, where festive bandits could do as they pleased. They might run into a gamekeeper or a labourer at any turn of the woodland paths, and then the kidnapping game would be up. The kidnappers were really running more risks than Mr. Mobbs. Mr. Mobbs's mind dwelt with pleasure upon the thought of seven years' penal servitude for each of them.

But the kidnappers were apparently following very lonely and secluded paths, and at times they pushed a way through thicket and bramble, as Mr. Mobbs discovered very easily by the thorns that scratched him in his passage.

It seemed to the dazed and miserable Mr. Mobbs that he had covered a dozen miles by the time they came to a halt. Probably it was only a mile or two, but Mr. Mobbs was not a good walker.

He felt stone flags under his feet now; he was no longer in the wood. Where was he? Somewhere in Kent, that was all he knew.

There was a low whistle, evidently a signal. Then footsteps on the stones. A low murmur of voices, and Mr. Mobbs distinguished the words, "Better knock 'im on the bloomin' 'ead!"

He shuddered.

"Gentlemen," he stammered, "I—I beg of you, do not be violent. I—I will make no resistance. I assure you—"

"'Old yer row!"

Mr. Mobbs shuddered into silence.

"Drag 'im in!"

The prisoner was marched on again. He felt himself being taken down stone steps, and a clammy air smote upon him. He was taken into an apartment—he realised that, although he could not see. The blindfolding cloth was suddenly taken from his eyes, and he blinked round him dazedly. His four captors were standing round him, dark and threatening; no one else was in sight.

Mr. Mobbs was in a small stone cell, evidently underground. The walls were bare, but there were old sacks on the floor, and a log of wood which could serve as a chair. A loaf and a stone jug of water were close at hand. It was plain that some little preparations had been made for the reception of the prisoner.

"Where am I?" gasped Mr. Mobbs.

"'Old yer row!"

"Oh, dear!"

"'Ere you are, in the 'eadquarters of the Black Gang," said the leader, in his hoarse, savage voice. "'Ere you stay till yore ransom is paid. We're goin' to 'ave a 'undred quid for you, or else——" He finished with a threatening gesture.

"Mum-mum-my dear sir," stuttered Mr. Mobbs, "I assure you——"

"Shut up! Mind, you try to get out of this, and you'll be knocked on the bloomin' 'ead afore you can say 'four ale.' You understand?"

"Oh, dear! Yes!"

"Hevery day," resumed the footpad, "you'll 'ave a loaf of bread and a jug of water until your ransom is paid."

"Goodness gracious!"

"Untie 'is 'ands, Bill. He can't git outer this. Blessed if I ain't 'arf a mind to knock 'im on the 'ead now!"

"I beg you——"

"'Old yer row! Come on, mates!"

The four ruffians quitted the room, and a heavy stone rolled into the place of the doorway. Mr. Mobbs started as he watched it. The ruffians had left an old smoky lantern burning in the cell, which dimly illumined Mr. Mobbs's prison. The unfortunate Form-master uttered an exclamation as he saw the stone door close. He knew where he was now. He had heard of that secret place under the ruins of the old priory of Friardale—indeed, he had once explored it with a party of juniors on a half-holiday. His heart sank. He knew where he was, but he knew that there was no possibility of opening that pivot stone from the inside of the cell. He was a helpless prisoner.

What would they think at Highcliffe when he did not turn up there? What would Dr. Voysey say when he heard of the demand for ransom? How ever would he get out of this dreadful scrape? What an awful calamity! And when these fearful ruffians learned that he was not really the Head of Highcliffe, and that there was little or no ransom to be expected for so unimportant a person as an under-master, what would they do with him?

Mr. Mobbs sat down on the log and almost wept.

Meanwhile, the ruffianly footpads had re-ascended the stairs and emerged into the ruins of the priory. Several fellows in Etons met them there, grinning. And the ruffianly four stripped off their coats, and their bags, and their big boots, and revealed schoolboy attire, and the faces of Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Squiff, and Johnny Bull. If Mr. Mobbs could have only seen them then his terrible fears would have been dissipated at once. But he could not see them.

"Oh, my hat!" gurgled Bob Cherry. "Blessed if I didn't nearly give it away half a dozen times! Wasn't his face a picture?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Held to ransom!" chuckled Squiff. "Oh, my hat! Poor old Mobby! As if anybody would ransom him for tuppence!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of Greyfriars yelled with laughter. The first part of the scheme had worked like a charm. Mr. Mobbs was a safe prisoner for the day; and certainly he would never dream of connecting his capture with the cheerful juniors of Greyfriars. He was quite convinced that he was in the hands of a desperate gang of ruffians who intended to hold him to ransom.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" gasped Bob Cherry, wiping his eyes. "Now, Wibby, it's your go."

"I'm nearly ready," said Wibley.

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Wibley was making himself up, with the aid of a glass stuck on the shattered wall of the old priory. The juniors watched him, chuckling. His resemblance to the captured Mr. Mobbs was growing every moment. While the real Mr. Mobbs was pacing the narrow limits of his cell, in the light of the smoky lantern, the spoof Mr. Mobbs was rapidly preparing to take his place. And so well was Wibley's artistic work done, that when he was finished the juniors could hardly believe that it was not the real Mr. Mobbs who stood before them.

Mr. Mobbs the Second blinked at them through his glasses.

"It is time for you juniors to get back," he squeaked, in Mr. Mobbs's voice. "What are you doing here at this time in the morning? Kindly get to your Form-rooms at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co., chuckling gleefully, rode back to Greyfriars on their bikes; and the new Mr. Mobbs took his way to Highcliffe for the great adventure.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Mobbs on the Warpath!

"MOBBY don't seem to be here," remarked the Caterpillar.

The Highcliffe Fourth were at breakfast. The place usually taken by Mr. Mobbs at the head of the Fourth Form table was vacant.

Mr. Mobbs was so punctual and regular in his habits that his absence from the breakfast-table excited considerable surprise and comment among the juniors. They were still more surprised when he failed to arrive for breakfast at all.

"Must be seedy," said Courtenay, as the juniors walked out into the quad.

"He went out as usual this mornin'," said the Caterpillar; "watched him trottin' out at the gates. I hope no dreadful accident has happened to Mobby. What should we do without our Mobby, by gad!"

"Oh, he'll turn up, like the bad penny!"

Courtenay was right. Just before the bell rang for morning classes, a meagre figure in a black frock-coat came in at the gates.

"There he is," remarked the Caterpillar. "I was hopin' there'd been an accident. Our luck's out!"

"Good-morning, sir!" said Ponsonby, as the little Form-master came hurrying up.

"Good-morning, Ponsonby!"

"You did not come in to brekker, sir," said Gadsby.

"No, Gadsby. For once in a way I have breakfasted out of doors. But it is time you were in your Form-room."

The bell began to ring.

Mr. Mobbs the Second went into the house and paused at the stairs. It was necessary for him to put on his gown to take the Fourth. He had to find his room. He called to Ponsonby.

"Ponsonby!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Kindly go to my room for my gown."

Ponsonby frowned a little. He did not like fagging, even for a master. But he obeyed. He started upstairs, and Mr. Mobbs the Second followed him and watched him go into Mr. Mobbs's room. He followed him in.

"You may go to your Form-room, Ponsonby."

"Yes!" snapped Ponsonby.

The Fourth Form-master turned on him.

"Yes, what?" he exclaimed.

"Eh?" ejaculated Ponsonby, in astonishment.

It was the first time Mr. Mobbs had ever spoken sharply to him.

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, sir!" growled Ponsonby.

"Kindly remember that you are speaking to your master, Ponsonby! I do not allow impertinence!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Don't utter ridiculous exclamations, Ponsonby! Take fifty lines!"

"Lines!" howled Ponsonby.

"Yes! Now go to your Form-room!"

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"I say, Mr. Mobbs—"

"Not a word! Go!"

Ponsonby went, like a fellow in a dream. Was this sharp, snappish master Mr. Mobbs, the toady and tuft-hunter, who had always seemed almost to worship the ground upon which the earl's nephew trod? Much as they profited by Mr. Mobbs's meanness and toadyism, the nuts of Highcliffe had always despised him for it, and sneered among themselves at his want of dignity. It seemed that Mr. Mobbs had determined to assert his dignity at last—with a vengeance!

Cecil Ponsonby's face was sullen as he came into the Form-room. He dropped into his place, and Gadsby and Monson gave him inquiring looks.

"Anythin' up?" asked Gadsby.

"That worm Mobby seems to be on the warpath this mornin'!" growled Ponsonby. "If I get any of his cheek, there'll be trouble!"

"Mobby! Why, what's the matter with Mobby?" asked Monson, in surprise.

Mr. Mobbs came into the Form-room, rustling in his gown. There was a buzz of conversation going on among Ponsonby and his friends. It was not at all unusual, for Mr. Mobbs generally let the nuts do as they liked. But this morning it appeared that there was a spirit of reform in the air.

The Form-master rapped on his desk with his cane.

"Silence!" he snapped.

Ponsonby deliberately went on speaking to Gadsby. He was deeply incensed by this sudden change in Mr. Mobbs, and he intended to show the toady that he could not play fast and loose with so considerable a personage as Cecil Ponsonby. The murmur of his voice was perfectly audible in the otherwise silent room.

"Ponsonby!" rapped out Mr. Mobbs.

"Hallo!" said Ponsonby.

That impertinent reply made the Fourth stare. There was a limit, even in dealing with Mr. Mobbs.

"Draw it mild, you ass!" whispered Vavasour. "He's ratty this mornin'."

"I don't care if he's ratty!"

"Ponsonby, stand up!"

Ponsonby lounged to his feet.

"You have addressed me very disrespectfully, Ponsonby," said Mr. Mobbs, peering at him over his glasses.

"Really, sir?"

"You are an impertinent young rascal, Ponsonby!"

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Gadsby.

"Indeed, sir!" said Ponsonby, with cool insolence.

"Come out here, Ponsonby."

"What for, sir?"

"I am going to cane you."

Ponsonby gave a jump.

"Can me! Me?" he ejaculated.

"Certainly. Come here at once."

"Oh, by gad!" murmured the Caterpillar to his chum. "The worm has turned—the giddy worm is bucking up at last! Bravo, Mobby!"

"Blessed if I understand it," muttered Courtenay, greatly puzzled. "Mobby

won't be asked home to Pon's place next vac, that's a cert."

"He's riskin' it, the noble hero. He's got the courage of a lion, along with the brains of an ass," said the Caterpillar.

"Silence in class!"

"Oh, by gad!"

"You are talking, De Courcy."

"Yaas, sir."

"I will maintain order in this class. If you break the rules of the Form-room again, De Courcy, I shall punish you. Ponsonby, come here at once!"

Ponsonby hesitated. He seemed inclined to defy the authority of his Form-master, but he hesitated. After all, if Mr. Mobbs chose to assert his authority, he had it all in his own hands. He had never chosen to assert it, with regard to Ponsonby & Co., and the sudden change enraged the chief of the nuts; but if he insisted upon being obeyed, he had to be obeyed.

"Are you coming, Ponsonby?"

Ponsonby decided to go. He lounged out before the class with his hands in his trousers' pockets, looking as insolent as possible.

"Take your hands out of your pockets immediately, Ponsonby."

Ponsonby obeyed.

"Now hold out your hand."

"Really, Mr. Mobbs—"

"Don't argue with me!" Mr. Mobbs picked up a cane from his desk. "Hold out your hand at once, you impertinent young rascal."

"By gad!" grinned the Caterpillar. "Fairly on the warpath! What on earth has come over Mobby, Franky?"

"Blessed if I know!"

Ponsonby was holding out his hand in a very gingerly way. It was a new experience to him to be caned, and he did not like it. His breast was full of rage and bitterness. Was this the obsequious master who had always considered him, favoured him, and protected him? What was causing the subservient Mr. Mobbs to change like this, with such startling suddenness?

Swish!

The cane came down through the air with a cut that would certainly have made Ponsonby jump, if he had received it on his palm. But he did not receive it there.

He jerked back his hand suddenly, instinctively. The cane, meeting with no resistance, swept downwards, and came with a loud crack on the master's own shin.

Crack!

"Yaroooh!" shrieked Mr. Mobbs, in anguish. "Oh, crumbs! Oh, my hat! Yowp! Oh, you blithering cuckoo! Oh! Ow!"

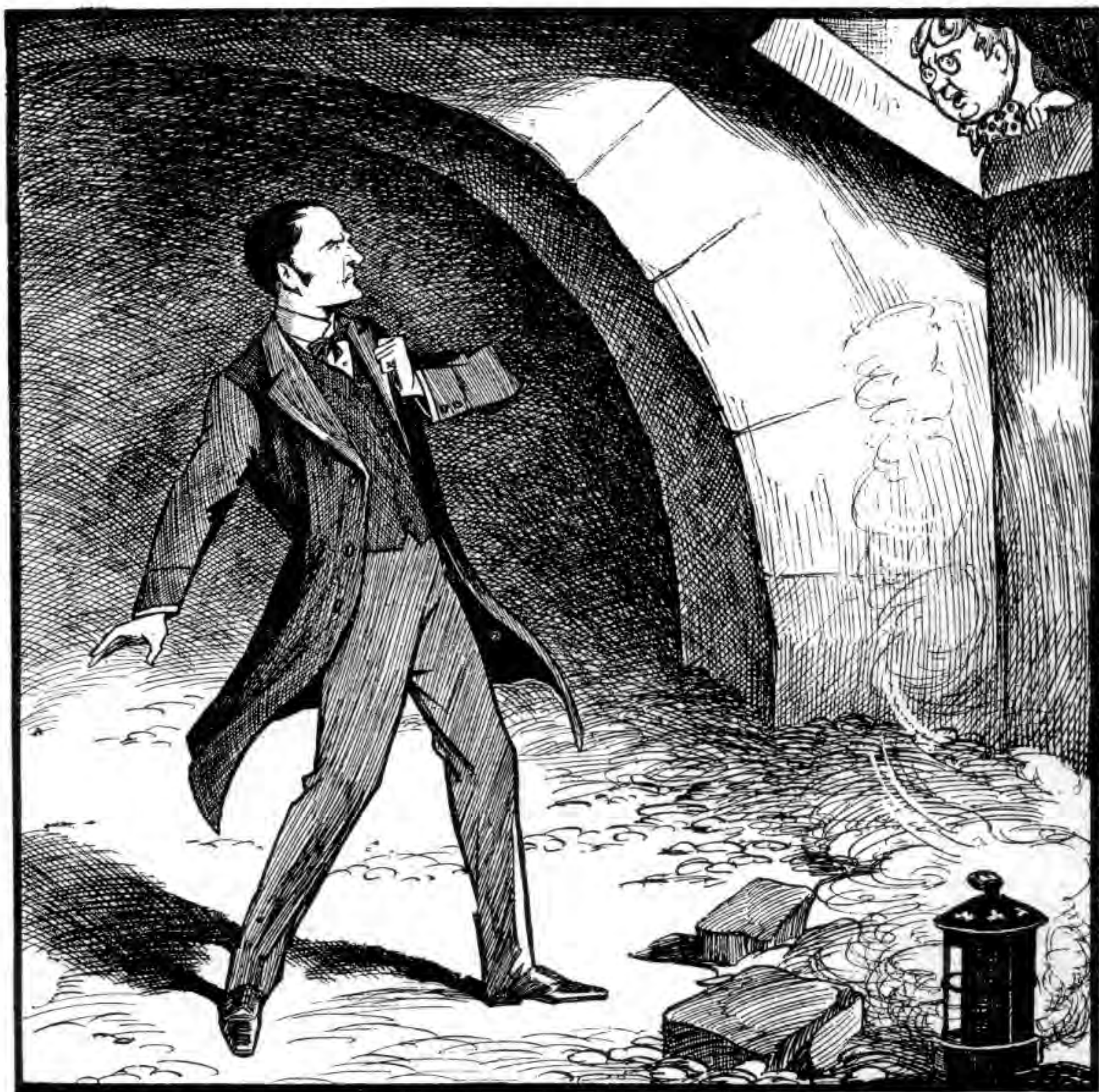
The Fourth-Form simply gasped. Those exceedingly boyish expressions from their Form-master astonished them.

Mr. Mobbs dropped the cane and danced on one leg, claspings the other leg with both hands.

"Ow! ow! ow! Yow! Yooop!"

Ponsonby grinned. But his grin





"G-g-great Scott!" stuttered Bunter. His eyes almost started through his spectacles, at the sight of a little thin gentleman in a black frock-coat, with a pale scared face. "Mr. Mobbs!" howled Bunter. (See Chapter 11.)

faded away as Mr. Mobbs clutched up the cane again, and made a jump at him. Ponsonby was seized by the collar, swung round, and then the cane came down across his shoulders. It was Ponsonby's turn to yell, and he yelled with all the force of his lungs.

Whack! whack! whack!

"Oh! Oh! Ah! Ow! Oh!"

Ponsonby struggled in the grasp of the Form-master. But the cane rose and fell with terrific force.

The nuts were all on their feet now. They were astounded, and they were angry. What the deuce did Mobbs mean by cutting up rusty like this? What was the matter with the little beast?

"There!" gasped the little master, throwing Ponsonby away from him. "Now go back to your place, Ponsonby."

"Ow! ow! ow!"

"Go back to your place at once!"

Ponsonby crawled back to his place. It was the severest thrashing he had had since he had been at Highcliffe. He dropped into his seat, gasping, and breathing fury.

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"By gad!" stammered Vavasour. "He must be mad, absolutely mad, you know, by gad!"

"Vavasour!"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Vavasour very meekly.

"Take a hundred lines for talking in class!"

"Ye-e-es, sir!"

And Vavasour did not talk again. It was only too plain that Mobbs was on the warpath, and that his kind consideration for the nuts of Highcliffe was a thing of the past. First lesson passed off in a thunderous atmosphere.

THE TENTH CHAPTER, The Nuts and the Nutcracker!

MR. MOBBS had amazed his class. After the licking of Ponsonby, most of the Fourth were very much on their good behaviour. But the nuts were furious. More than one licking was required to reduce the great



Ponsonby to the level of a common or garden member of the Fourth Form. He had been accustomed to having his own way too long. It was too sudden a change to fall from his high estate at one fell swoop.

He sat gritting his teeth. The other nuts made signs to one another, and exchanged an occasional whisper. They were feeling inclined to boil Mobby in oil. The favouritism of the master had given them a specially easy position in the Form, and they had always slacked at their work, and had been allowed to slack. They were not inclined to begin hard work without a struggle.

Even the Caterpillar looked uneasy when he was called upon to construe. For the Caterpillar, with all his good qualities, was as great a slacker as any of the nuts. His chum and study-mate had frequently induced him to work, but only by dint of powerful persuasion; and, as it happened, Courtenay had made him do his preparation the previous evening. De Courcy was glad of it now. He stumbled somehow through his construe, wondering whether the storm was to burst upon him in turn.

But the master was curiously easy in the lesson. Perhaps his classical knowledge was not much greater than that of the Highcliffe juniors.

At all events, he found no fault with the Caterpillar's quantities, which would have made "Quintilian stare and gasp," but fortunately did not produce that effect upon Mr. Mobbs.

De Courcy breathed with relief when he was through with his ordeal.

"Blessed if I didn't feel quite nervous, Franky," he whispered.

"I wonder he didn't drop on you," said Courtenay. "You gave him about a dozen good openings, and he seems to be on the warpath this morning."

"Must be his liver."

"Something's the matter with him, certainly."

"Poor old Pon! Look at him grindin' his teeth!" murmured the Caterpillar. "This will make it rotten for Pon if Mobby keeps it up."

"You are talking, De Courcy?" said the master.

"Yaas, sir."

"Kindly keep silent."

"Certainly, sir," said De Courcy, wondering why lines did not fall upon him.

But for some reason best known to himself, Mr. Mobbs's attention was wholly given to the nuts, and he passed lightly over the faults of others. It was favouritism, of a kind the nuts had not been accustomed to. Fellows of no account like Smithson and Benson, who had no rich relations, had always received the sharp edge of Mr. Mobbs's tongue, and Ponsonby & Co. had enjoyed watching their sufferings. Now the "outsiders" were left severely alone, and it was the nuts themselves who went through the raggings. They were bewildered and exasperated.

"We'll make the cad suffer for this," Gadsby whispered, after receiving a hundred lines for stupidity. "We'll get our people to speak to the Head about it. We'll show Mobby that he can't do as he likes."

"The rotten cad!" said Monson. "Turning on us like this! What have we done to the beast, I'd like to know!"

"Mind your eye!" whispered Drury. "He's watchin' you, Gaddy."

"Hang him!" said Gaddy savagely.

"Gadsby!" came Mr. Mobbs's voice rapping out.

Gadsby glared.

"You are not only stupid, Gadsby, and careless with your lessons, but you persist in talking in class instead of attending to your instruction! You will stand in the corner till the end of morning lessons!"

"What!" gasped Gadsby, in rage and amazement.

"Go into the corner at once, Gadsby!" said Mr. Mobbs, pointing with his cane.

"The—the corner, sir?"

"Immediately!"

Gadsby rose in a fury. To be set to stand in a corner like a naughty kid in the Second Form was a little too much. Gadsby's brow was black as thunder as he went into the corner.

"Turn your face to the wall, Gadsby!"

"What for, sir?" demanded Gadsby rebelliously.

"Because I order you to!" snapped Mr. Mobbs.

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Gadsby, quivering with rage, stood in the corner, with his face turned to the wall. The Fourth-Formers chuckled. Gadsby's punishment was so ridiculous for a fellow of his age and size that his Form-fellows could not help thinking it funny. But it did not seem funny to Gaddy. He was feeling murderous.

"What'll he do next?" murmured the Caterpillar. "I'm gettin' interested in Mobby. This is a new departure. It's awf'ly interestin'."

The nuts were looking to Ponsonby. Pon was their leader, and it was up to Pon to strike a blow for them in this new, strange, and unexpected dilemma. If Mr. Mobbs was to keep on like this life would not be worth living at Highcliffe. But Ponsonby was not feeling up to striking a blow for independence. He was still aching from the thrashing he had received. The nuts were disappointed in their leader.

Lines continued to fall thickly upon the enraged and unhappy nuts.

During the morning there was not a member of the noble and select circle who did not accumulate at least two hundred lines. Smithson & Co., who generally gathered in impots, went scot-free. They could scarcely believe in their good luck, and they rejoiced.

The nuts almost gasped with relief when the Form-room clock indicated the hour of dismissal.

But there was no dismissal yet for the nuts.

"Dismiss!" said Mr. Mobbs. "All boys who have received impositions will stay in and write them out before dinner!"

"Oh!" said the nuts.

The rest of the Fourth filed out. Ponsonby & Co. remained behind. Mr. Mobbs blinked at them from his desk.

"Ah, you are the idlest and stupidest boys in the class!" he remarked. "You should be ashamed of your attainments—I should say, your want of attainments! You are a disgrace to the Form!"

Ponsonby & Co. gritted their teeth and said nothing.

"However, we shall change all that," went on Mr. Mobbs. "In future I wish you to understand that you are to work, and work seriously. I shall have no mercy upon slackers! I am dissatisfied with you!"

Mr. Mobbs quitted the Form-room, and then the rage of the nuts broke out into words as the door closed behind him.

"The cad! The rotter! The beast! The outsider!"

"We're not going to stand it!"

"Absolutely not!"

"What are we goin' to do, Pon? We can't let him run on like this."

"Life wouldn't be worth livin', by gad! We're gettin' all that he used to give to those cads, Smithson and the rest."

"All very well for those outsiders, but he can't treat us like this."

"What's the programme, Pon?"

Ponsonby clenched his fists.

"I can't understand him," he said. "He may be seedy; I know he has a bad liver, the unhealthy beast! He can't mean to keep this up. If he does we'll make Highcliffe too hot to hold him. We'll get our people down on him. But he can't mean to keep it up—he can't. And we're not goin' to be detained."

"What are we goin' to do?" asked Gadsby doubtfully.

"We're goin' out."

"Phew!"

"Follow your leader!" said Ponsonby.

He marched determinedly to the door. The nuts, encouraged by their leader's example, raised a faint cheer, and followed him. Ponsonby hurled open the door and led his flock out into the passage.

They marched almost into Mr. Mobbs. The master was standing in the passage—perhaps in anticipation of some such move.

"Stop!" he shouted.

"Oh, gad!"

"Did I not detain you?" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs.

Ponsonby's face set sullenly.

"We don't want to be detained," he said.

"Are you aware, Ponsonby, that I am your Form-master?" demanded Mr. Mobbs. "Are you aware that I

expect my authority to be respected? I shall cane you all for breaking your detention! You first, Pensonby! Hold out your hand!"

Pensonby paused a moment, but he remembered the thrashing in the Form-room and he held out his hand.

Swish! Swish!

"You next, Gadsby!"

Swish! Swish!

The furious nuts crowded back into the Form-room, each of them the richer by two severe cuts. They glared at each other almost speechlessly.

"Good gad!" gasped Vavasour at last. "How—how ever are we goin' to stand this, dear boys?"

"We're not goin' to stand it!" shrieked Monson.

"What can we do, by Jove?"

"Rush the cad, and rag him!" suggested Gadsby.

But that bold suggestion was received in chilling silence. Rushing Mr. Mobbs and ragging him was rather too daring an enterprise for the nuts of Highcliffe. They decided to do their lines instead. And from then till the bell rang for dinner little was heard in the Form-room but a weary scratching of pens.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Makes a Surprising Discovery!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. came out of the Remove Form-room at Greyfriars while Pensonby and his friends were under detention in their Form-room at Highcliffe. The Famous Five had been thinking more about Wibley than about their lessons that morning. They could not help wondering how the "spoof" Form-master was getting on at Highcliffe.

"Can't have been bowled out," said Bob Cherry. "He would have been back by this time if there had been any suspicion."

"It's working," chuckled Squiff. "I only wish we could be over at Highcliffe to see it."

"Why shouldn't we?" said Wharton. "It's a half-holiday this afternoon, and we can go over and see Courtenay if we like."

"Hear, hear!"

"In fact, I told Courtenay we might drop in this afternoon," said Harry. "We've got some points about the cricket to settle."

"We'll jolly well go," said Bob Cherry. "We might come in useful, too, in case there's any trouble for Wib."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Buzz off, Bunter!"

"When are you chaps starting?" asked Bunter, blinking in reproachful inquiry at the chums of the Remove. "I want to be ready, you know."

"Go and eat coke, dear boy!"

"I'm coming," Bunter explained. "Wibley would be disappointed if I didn't turn up. That's why I'm coming. Not that I care much for your rotten feed!"

"It isn't a feed!" roared Johnny Bull.

"What is it, then?"

"Find out!"

"Oh, really, Bull! The fact is, you fellows, if Wibley's going to bring his people, I think I ought to be there—"

"Wibley isn't going to bring his people," said Wharton.

"Then what's he gone home for?"

"He hasn't gone home."

"Then where is he?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"I say, you fellows, don't walk away while I'm talking to you! Beasts!"

Billy Bunter blinked wrathfully after the Famous Five as they strolled away across the Close. He was more curious than ever, and more than ever convinced that some treat of unusual magnitude was in preparation, and that he was to be left out of it.

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter. "After all I've done for 'em, too! Ungrateful beasts! But I'm jolly well going to keep an eye on them."

Billy Bunter kept two eyes on them, as a matter of fact, not to mention a pair of spectacles. He was determined that the Famous Five should not escape him that afternoon.

When the chums went out after dinner Billy Bunter promptly rolled out after them. The Famous Five went round to the bike-shed for their machines, and Bunter ran them down as they wheeled the bikes out.

"I say, you fellows— Yow! Keep that rotten like

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away from me, Bob Cherry, you beast! Are you going biking?"

"We are—we is."

"Where are you going to meet Wibley?"

"Ask us another."

"Look here, I'm coming to the picnic," said Bunter. "If you're going to bike it I'll borrow Toddy's bike. Is Wibley's place far away?"

"We're not going to Wibley's place, fathead."

"Wait till I get Toddy's bike out," yelled Bunter as the five juniors wheeled their machines out.

"Bow-wow!"

Bunter desperately grabbed Toddy's bike off the stand. Unfortunately for him Peter Todd came in for it just then. He jerked it away and wheeled it off, unheeding Bunter's indignant expostulations.

"Beast!" howled Bunter. "I suppose I shall have to take Squiff's bike, and the beastly thing is too high for me."

He lifted down Squiff's bike. But his luck was still out. Sampson Quincy Ifley Field was one of the party for Highcliffe, and he came in for his machine.

"What are you doing with my bike?" the Australian junior demanded, indignantly.

"I—I want you to lend it to me."

"I'll lend you a thick ear," growled Squiff. "Hand it over!"

"Now look here, Squiff—yooooop!"

Squiff sat the Owl of the Remove down on the floor and wheeled the machine away. Billy Bunter sat and gasped, and then jumped up as he remembered that the cyclists would be out of sight if he didn't hurry. He bolted out of the bike-shed and rushed for the gates.

But they were gone.

Billy Bunter blinked up and down the road, but the seven riders were out of sight, and there was nothing to indicate which direction they had taken.

"Oh, the rotters!" gasped Bunter. "The beasts! They've dodged me! Oh, the cads! After all I've done for 'em!"

Harry Wharton and Co. were riding away cheerfully for Courtfield, en route for Highcliffe. Billy Bunter stood in the road and snorted.

He was at a loss.

"Where the deuce have the beasts gone?" murmured Bunter. "If they ain't going to see Wibley's people, where are they going? They were talking about the old priory the other day."

Bunter reflected.

The old priory in the wood was a good distance from Greyfriars on foot, and Bunter did not like exertion on a warm afternoon. He decided to borrow Tom Brown's bike and ride. He could easily leave the bike to take care of itself when he came to the footpath. If anything happened to the abandoned bike it would be really fortunate that it belonged to Tom Brown and not to himself.

But there was no end to Bunter's misfortunes that afternoon. He was soon in the bike-shed again, but as he was wheeling the machine out the New Zealand junior spotted him. Tom Brown did not waste any time in talk. The last time Bunter had borrowed his machine it had been returned with a bent pedal and a broken chain, and Bunter had declined all responsibility for the necessary repairs. Once was enough in Tom Brown's opinion. The New Zealand junior picked up a bike-pump and started on Bunter. Billy Bunter let go the bike as if it had become suddenly red-hot, and fled for his life.

Tom Brown chased him as far as the School House, lunging with the pump at Bunter's fat person, eliciting a wild yell from Bunter at every lunge. The Owl of the Remove streaked for the gates, and did not pause to take breath till he was in the road.

"Oh, dear! Beast! Yow!" mumbled Bunter, as he pumped in breath. "I've a jolly good mind—yow!—to go back and lick him—ow!—but I've got no time to waste on him—groooh! I suppose I had better hoof it—wow!"

So Billy Bunter hoofed it.

He tramped away in a very disconsolate mood. He did not like a long walk on a warm afternoon, especially with an uncertainty at the end of it. The only clue he had to the whereabouts of the supposed picnickers was the mention of the old priory—and if he did not find them there he was "done." The fat junior grunted and perspired as he rolled away, and it was a long time before the ruins of the priory, embosomed in the thick wood, came into sight.

Billy Bunter halted in the ruins and mopped his streaming brow with his handkerchief.

There was no sign of the Famous Five or Wibley there. No sign whatever of a picnic.

"Beasts!" was Bunter's comment.

He blinked round suspiciously among the ruins. He blinked into the gloomy opening that led to the vaults. Then his eyes gleamed behind his spectacles. A glimmering object on the ground met his eye. He picked it up and blinked at it triumphantly. It was a fragment of silver tissue, such as is wrapped round chocolates. It was quite clean and new, and so evidently could not have been on the ground there very long—some time that day, at all events.

"They're here, the beasts," grinned Bunter. "They must have seen me coming and dodged down there to spoof me. I'll jolly soon run 'em down. This jolly well shows that somebody's been here, and I know who that somebody is."

Billy Bunter blinked down the steps into the vaults below. The opening was very dark and forbidding, and Bunter had had an unpleasant adventure there once, and he did not quite relish a descent into the shadowy depths. But he was convinced that the picnickers were there. The fragment of silver tissue was a clue. It proved that someone had been there that day, and naturally it did not occur to Bunter that they had been there before morning lessons.

"I say, you fellows, I know you're here!" shouted Bunter. "I'm coming down."

"Down!" answered the booming echoes below.

"Wharton, you rotter—do you hear?"

"Hear!" came back the echo.

Bunter grunted and descended the stone steps. He struck a wax vesta and blinked round him. On one side lay the deep vaults, on the other the subterranean passage that led towards Greyfriars. Before him was a blank stone wall, in which was the pivot-stone giving access to the hidden cell. Bunter blinked right and left, but only deep shadows met his gaze.

"Hiding in there, the beasts!" growled Bunter. "I'll jolly soon have 'em out."

He struck another match and felt over the stone that closed up the cell. He knew where to press to set the pivot in motion. The heavy stone swung back and a light struck upon Bunter's blinking eyes. It came from a smoky lantern on the floor of the cell.

"G-g-great Scott!" stuttered Bunter.

His eyes almost started through his spectacles at the sight of a little thin gentleman in a black frock-coat, with a pale, scared face.

"Mr. Mobbs!" howled Bunter.

Mr. Mobbs gasped.

"Bunter! Is that Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove? How did you find me here? Where are they?"

"They!" ejaculated Bunter. "Who?"

"The ruffians!" panted Mr. Mobbs. "The kidnappers!"

Bunter gave a yelp.

"Yow! I didn't know there were any—my hat!—I'm off!"

And Bunter bolted for the stairs. He had not the slightest inclination to deal with ruffians and kidnappers in those gloomy depths.

Mr. Mobbs, trembling in every limb, followed him. He hardly dared to risk making his escape, even now the stone door was open. For if the kidnappers had spotted him he remembered their dreadful threats. But he had had enough of that gloomy recess under the old priory, and he screwed up his courage to the sticking-point and made the venture. On tiptoe, trembling and shivering, he made his way from the cell and up the stone stair after the panting Bunter.

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There was neither ruffian nor kidnapper in sight! Mr. Mobbs was soon breathing the free air in the sunny summer's afternoon. He was free!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Little Exercise!

"G LAD to see you, dear boys!"

"Welcome as the flowers in May!" said Courtenay cordially. "We'll get up some cricket—what?"

Harry Wharton & Co. had arrived at Highcliffe. Courtenay and the Caterpillar greeted them warmly. Ponsonby & Co. could be seen in the quadrangle, but they were not looking their usual selves. The nuts were down on their luck. The glory had departed from the House of Israel, so to speak. Canings and detentions did not agree with the nuts, and they were as exasperated as they were perplexed.

They had been muttering among themselves, and scowling, and they scowled still more at the sight of the Greyfriars fellows.

"We thought we'd drop in," remarked Bob Cherry. "Has somebody been cracking your nuts? They don't look very chippy."

Courtenay laughed.

"They've had a bad time this morning," he remarked.

"A regular scorcher of a time, by gad!" chuckled the Caterpillar. "Mobby has cut up rusty with his nobby nuts."

"Mobby has?" grinned the Greyfriars party.

"Yaas—he's a regular tartar to-day. Ponsonby's had an awful lickin' in class——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The whole gang were detained doin' lines till dinner-time——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And caned all round for breakin' their detention——"

The Greyfriars juniors yelled. They had wondered how Wibley was getting on at Highcliffe. They knew now.

It was evident that the new Mr. Mobbs had been making things decidedly warm for the nuts of Highcliffe.

"Anything else?" grinned Wharton.

"No; that's the total bill, so far," said the Caterpillar. "But Pon & Co. are simply flabbergasted, by gad! They can't make it out. They were always Mobby's prime favourites. Pon took Mobby home once to see his noble uncle. Ever since that Mobby had been prepared to lick the dust off his boots. Now, all of a sudden, he has turned on them. The worm will turn, you know, but I never believed that a worm like Mobby would turn."

"But he's done it!" chuckled Courtenay. "It was a surprise for the whole Form. Mobby was fairly on the war-path."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They don't know what to make of it," said the Caterpillar. "If Mobby keeps on as he's started to-day, they're fairly in for it. A dreary prospect of workin' every day, and doin' their prep every evenin'; no more favouritism, no more rotti'n', you know. Awful hard lines on Pon, ain't it?"

"Awful!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"The awfulness is terrific."

"Must be a surprise for them," said Harry Wharton.

"And you don't know what's the matter with Mobby?"

"Can't make it out."

"It's a giddy mystery," said Courtenay. "Mobby must be ill, or dotty. He's made the nuts hate him like poison already, and I fancy they've got some scheme afoot for getting their people to complain to the Head, and get him the sack."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Here he comes," yawned the Caterpillar.

Mr. Mobbs, the second, appeared in the quad. Ponsonby & Co. scowled at him, as he came up to the group of Greyfriars juniors. Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at him, but they simply could not recognise Wibley. It was Mr. Mobbs to the life. But, considering that he was Mr. Mobbs, he was very gracious to the party from Greyfriars.

"Ah, my young friends," said the little master. "I am glad to see you here!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Wharton.

Courtenay and the Caterpillar simply stared. After Mr. Mobbs's conduct the previous week towards the Greyfriars chums, this was a startling change of face.

The Caterpillar tapped his forehead significantly. He could only conclude that Mr. Mobbs was wandering in his mind.

"You have come over to play cricket, perhaps?" Mr. Mobbs continued.

"We were thinking of a little game, sir," said Nugent.

"Very good! Now, how do you like the idea of giving some instruction to certain boys of my Form who have, I am sorry to say, shown a slacking spirit with regard to games? It would be a kind act."

"What-ho!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "I—I mean, yes, rather, sir!"

"Am I dreamin', Franky?" murmured the Caterpillar.

Frank Courtenay wondered whether he was dreaming too.

"Very well," said Mr. Mobbs, "I take you at your word. Ponsonby." He beckoned to the nuts, and Ponsonby & Co. came up with dark faces.

"Ponsonby, I am sorry to see you slacking about the quadrangle on a half-holiday," said Mr. Mobbs, in his severest, squeaky tones.

"I suppose we can do as we like on a half-holiday, sir," said Ponsonby sullenly. Mr. Mobbs had never reproved him for slacking before.

"Not in the least, Ponsonby. I disapprove of slacking. You had better play cricket this afternoon."

"I don't care to, sir."

"You will play cricket by my orders, Ponsonby. These Greyfriars boys have kindly consented to give you some much-needed instruction."

"What!" yelled Ponsonby.

"B-b-by gad!" stammered Vavasour.

"Go on the ground at once! You need not trouble to change; I fear the exertion might be too much for you," said the Form-master sarcastically. "Master Wharton, I depend on you to see that these slacking lads have plenty of exercise."

"Rely on me, sir," said Wharton.

Ponsonby & Co. could scarcely believe their eyes and ears. Mr. Mobbs was not only down on them, but apparently on good terms with the Greyfriars juniors. What was the meaning of it all?

"I won't go!" muttered Gadsby.

Mr. Mobbs's eyes were upon him at once.

"Gadsby! What did you say?"

"I—I said I'm quite ready, sir," stammered Gadsby.

"Very good! Get on the field immediately. I shall watch you. Any boy who shows a sign of slacking will be detained the whole afternoon, to write out *Caesar* until six o'clock!"

The dismayed nuts went sullenly on the field. Even fagging at cricket was better than writing out "*De Bello Gallico*" all the afternoon. Mr. Mobbs was evidently in earnest. Hitherto the nuts of Highcliffe had only experienced the velvet glove; now they were getting the iron hand.

Harry Wharton & Co. went on the field grinning. Wibley's latest wheeze tickled them immensely. And they fully intended to give the Highcliffe slackers plenty of leather-hunting.

"Poor old Pon!" murmured the Caterpillar, lounging up to the pavilion to watch. "He will be quite worn out by the time Mobby gets taken to an asylum."

"It will do him good," said Courtenay, laughing. "I like Mobby better like this than in his old style."

"Pon doesn't!" grinned the Caterpillar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pon didn't. Mr. Mobbs—displaying a knowledge of cricket the nuts had never suspected him of before—put the slackers into the field, and Wharton and Bob Cherry went on to bat. Ponsonby sullenly went on to bowl, and he bowled very badly. It was pretty clear that he was trying to hit the batsman, not the wicket. Mr. Mobbs rapped out at him.

"Ponsonby, you are bowling like a baby! Give the ball to Courtenay, and go into the field. Courtenay, oblige me by bowling."

"Certainly, sir!"

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Courtenay bowled, and then the batsmen got to work, and the field were given some leather-hunting to do. All the nuts were in the field, and they dawdled after the ball, till Mr. Mobbs's sharp voice snapped out to them.

"Gadsby, don't slack! Merton, get a move on! Monson, you are a lazy and incompetent young fool! Vavasour!"

"Yaas, sir!"

"Unless you exert yourself, I shall send you into the Form-room with a thousand lines to write out."

"Oh, by gad!"

The miserable nuts began to exert themselves. But Vavasour was soon slacking again, and Mr. Mobbs yelled to him.

"Vavasour, go into the Form-room at once! You will write out a thousand lines, and if they are not finished by six o'clock, you will be detained for three half-holidays. Not a word, sir! Go!"

Vavasour, in utter dismay, tramped off the field, and disappeared into the School House. The lesson was enough for the rest of the nutty band. They exerted themselves manfully, and hunted the leather up and down the ground, as it was driven by the batsmen, till the unaccustomed exertion made them pant and gasp and stream with perspiration.

The Greyfriars juniors looked on with smiling faces. The Caterpillar felt like a fellow in a dream. What had come over Mobby?

For a whole hour, the merciless Mobby kept the unhappy slackers of Highcliffe fagging on the cricket-field. By that time, Ponsonby & Co. were ready to drop with exhaustion. They stumbled and fumbled and moaned and gasped, and mopped their streaming faces, till even the Greyfriars fellows, much as they despised the slackers, took pity on them.

"That will do!" said Mr. Mobbs at last. "Do you feel better for this exercise, Ponsonby?"

"Oh, dear!" said Ponsonby faintly.

"Do you feel better, Gadsby?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You may go now. Remember that this is only the beginning. I will have no more slacking in my Form!"

With suppressed groans, the wretched nuts limped and staggered off the field. Mr. Mobbs glanced kindly at the grinning juniors of Greyfriars.

"Thank you very much, my dear boys! If you would care to refresh yourselves after your little game, pray come with me to the tuckshop."

"Hear, hear!" said the Co.

They accompanied Mr. Mobbs to the tuckshop, where they refreshed themselves with flowing ginger-pop.

"Pinch me, Franky!" murmured the Caterpillar. "I want to know whether I'm dreaming."

Many other fellows at Highcliffe wondered whether they were dreaming, too; and quite a crowd came to peep into the tuckshop, to gaze in almost awed wonder upon the extraordinary sight of Mr. Mobbs treating Harry Wharton & Co. to ginger-pop, and imbibing that refreshing beverage himself with apparent enjoyment.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Mobbs the Reformer!

"O H, dear!"

"I'm nearly expirin'!"

"What's to be done, Pon? We can't stand it. Oh, dear!"

The unhappy nuts had gathered in Ponsonby's study; with the exception of the still more unhappy Vavasour, who was grinding out lines in the Form-room.

Ponsonby & Co. were in a state of desperation. They lay about the study in every attitude of limpness and exhaustion. Monson had collapsed into an armchair; Ponsonby was stretched on the sofa; Gadsby was leaning across the table; Drury was gasping on the rug; Merton and Tunstall were fanning themselves feebly. Never had the nuts felt so utterly used-up.

"We can't stand it, y'know," moaned Monson feebly.

"It'll kill me. What an utter beast Mobby is. I wish a Zeppelin would drop a bomb on him! Oh, dear!"

"What are we goin' to do, Pon?"

But the wretched Pon had no suggestion to offer. They had to grin and bear it, if they could. Bearing it, at least, was necessary. Grinning was out of the question. They did not feel like grinning.

It was a good hour before the slackers of Highcliffe pulled themselves together. They did not leave the study. They were afraid of catching the eye of the terrible Mr. Mobbs—Mr. Mobbs, once so kind and considerate, and now so Hunnish.

"Let's have a little game," said Ponsonby, taking a pack of cards from the drawer of the table. "And a smoke will set us up a bit."

"Suppose Mobby—" began Gadsby uneasily.

"Mobby never comes here."

"But since he's turned out such a beast—"

"We'll lock the door."

"Oh, all right!"

The nuts felt somewhat comforted as they sat playing nap, with cigarettes going, and little piles of money on the table. It was one of their nice little customs, and it made them feel better. At least they were safe in the study, so they believed. But there seemed to be no end to their troubles that day. Before the "little game" had lasted half an hour there came a sharp rap at the door.

The handle was tried, and then the rap was repeated, so loudly and sharply, that it rang out like the crack of a pistol.

"Open this door at once!"

"Mobby!" gasped Gadsby.

In wild haste the nuts shoved the cards, the cigarettes, and the money out of sight. The Mobby of former times had always been careful not to discover the manners and customs of the nuts. But the Mobby of to-day was on the warpath, and he had evidently come there to catch them.

"Will you open this door?"

"Buck up!" panted Monson, pale with terror. "The beast might report this to the Head! Oh, dear!"

Rap, rap, rap!

"Ponsonby, open this door! I can smell tobacco-smoke here!"

"The game's up!" moaned Drury. "Oh, you idiot, Pon! What did you start smoking for? You might have known!"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Ponsonby savagely.

He unlocked the door. Cards and cigarettes were hidden, but he could not hide the smoke that loaded the atmosphere of the study. But that had to be chanced. The irate Form-master could not be refused admittance.

"Why was that door locked?" exclaimed the Form-master, as he rustled into the study.

"Ahem!"

Mr. Mobbs coughed.

"You have been smoking!"

It was not much use to deny it. The study reeked with it. Ponsonby & Co. maintained a sullen silence.

"What else have you been doing?"

Silence.

"Gambling, I presume!"

No answer.

"Turn out your pockets!"

Slowly and sullenly the nuts obeyed. All kinds of things were turned out—cards and dice and cigarettes among other things.

"Disgraceful!" hooted Mr. Mobbs. "Shocking! Are you aware that you may be expelled from the school for this rascally conduct? It is my duty to report this to Dr. Voysey."

Ponsonby gritted his teeth. He knew that the doctor would not thank Mr. Mobbs for making it necessary for him to expel a number of juniors who had rich and influential relations.

"Report it, then," said Ponsonby fiercely, "and we'll tell him at the same time that you've known it a jolly long time, Mr. Mobbs."

"What—what!"

"Do you think we didn't know that you knew?" hissed Ponsonby, quite forgetting prudence in his rage.

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"You've kept your eyes shut jolly carefully, and I can't make out what you've spotted us for now."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Mr. Mobbs, a surprising ejaculation for a Form-master. Ponsonby's statement somewhat surprised Wibley of the Remove.

But he remembered himself in a moment.

"Ponsonby, you are impertinent! You will take a thousand lines! Put those cards and cigarettes into the grate, and set fire to them immediately. For this time I will not report you to the Head, but the next time you shall be expelled from Highcliffe. Make an end of those wicked things at once!"

Sullenly the nuts piled cards, cigarettes, and dice-box into the grate, and ignited them. There was soon quite a blaze going. Mr. Mobbs turned out the table-drawer, and discovered more cards and bridge-markers, and several sporting papers and racing lists, which he promptly tossed into the fire. It was a clean sweep, and probably the best thing that could have happened to the sporting set of the Fourth, though they did not look at it in that light.

They looked on with burning eyes and set lips as Mr. Mobbs proceeded upon his career of reform. When he had finished he glared at them over his glasses.

"Disgraceful! Are you not ashamed of yourselves?"

Sullen silence!

"Are you ashamed of yourselves?" thundered Mr. Mobbs.

"Ye-e-s, sir!" stammered Monson.

"Will you promise amendment in the future, if I pardon your stupid wickedness on this occasion?"

"Yes, sir!" The nuts would have promised anything at that moment.

"Very well," said Mr. Mobbs, "I shall allow the matter to end here. But remember I shall have an eye on you in the future. I will pass this matter over now, only giving you a thousand lines each. I understand now the exhaustion you showed on the cricket-field; it is due to this vile smoking, which has sapped away your stamina. I will not allow you to destroy your health in this way. I will—"

Mr. Mobbs suddenly paused.

He was standing near the study window, and his eyes had suddenly fallen upon a figure in the quadrangle, coming from the direction of the gates.

It was a skinny figure in a black frock-coat, somewhat rumpled and muddy.

Mr. Mobbs stood transfixed, the words dying away on his tongue.

For it was the real Mobby who was tramping across the quad towards the house—the real, genuine article, who had evidently escaped from the cell under the old priory earlier than the Greyfriars japers had planned.

"Great Scott!" gasped Mr. Mobbs.

His next action astounded Ponsonby & Co.

With a single bound he reached the doorway of the study and fled. His rapid footsteps died away down the passage.

Ponsonby & Co. gazed at one another in stupefaction.

If they had needed any proof that their Form-master was mad they had received it now. For that extraordinary action was proof positive that Mr. Mobbs was as mad as a hatter!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Exit Mr. Mobbs!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. had seen the new arrival, too.

They were chatting with Courtenay and the Caterpillar outside the house when he appeared in sight.

They stared at him blankly in dismay. Bob Cherry caught Wharton's arm.

"Mobby!" he said faintly.

"Mobby!" stuttered Johnny Bull.

"The Mobbyfulness is terrific!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Courtenay and De Courcy looked surprised.

Mobby, by gad!" said the Caterpillar. "I thought he was in the house. I'll swear I saw him go indoors!"

"I'm sure I did!" said Courtenay, rubbing his eyes. "Blessed if I saw him go out again!"

Mr. Mobbs, looking very sour, came up the steps. He frowned at the Greyfriars fellows, taking no other notice of their existence. He was looking very muddy and dusty and rumpled.

"Had an accident, sir?" asked the Caterpillar, surveying Mr. Mobbs's rumpled attire.

"I have had worse than that, De Courcy!" gasped Mr. Mobbs. "I have been the victim of a savage and brutal gang of ruffians. I have been kidnapped!"

"Kidnapped!" exclaimed Courtenay.

"Yes. The whole day I have been a prisoner in an underground cell!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"I was released by chance. A schoolboy happened to come there—a boy named Bunter, belonging to Greyfriars. Then I escaped."

"Bunter!" murmured Bob Cherry. "I'll scalp him!"

"But—but—but—" stammered Courtenay, in utter amazement. "You—you have been a prisoner all day, did you say, sir?"

"Yes. I was seized this morning, while taking my walk, by a gang of dastardly, masked ruffians!"

"But—but we saw you here half an hour ago, sir!"

"What?"

"You took the Fourth this mornin', sir," said the Caterpillar.

Mr. Mobbs staggered.

"What do you mean, De Courcy?" he exclaimed, in a shrill voice. "I tell you I have been a prisoner all day in an underground cell, after being kidnapped by a gang of dastards, who intended to hold me to ransom. They mistook me for the Head of Highcliffe, and seized me—seized me by violence. I have only just escaped."

"But—but—Then, who took the Fourth this morning?" gasped Courtenay.

"I do not understand you, Courtenay." Mr. Mobbs passed his hand over his brow in a dazed way. "Do you mean to say that someone took the Fourth this morning, and you supposed it was I?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Was I—was I not missed?"

"No, sir."

"This is astounding!" ejaculated Mr. Mobbs. "The plot is deeper than I dreamed. But—but if some scoundrel has been here in my name, how was it that you did not recognise that it was not I? Did he resemble me?"

"If it wasn't you, sir, it was your double," said the Caterpillar. "But it was you, sir. Excuse me, but—but haven't you been—been ill, or something?"

Mr. Mobbs did not reply. He rushed into the house to see the Head at once. The Caterpillar rubbed his nose.

"I knew he must be potty," he remarked. "He's been actin' all day as if he was potty. Now he fancies he's been kidnapped. Extraordinary, ain't it?"

"Where on earth's Wib?" muttered Wharton.

"Oh, dear! He'll be caught!" whispered Squiff. "That idiot Bunter—oh, we'll slaughter him! Wib will be spotted."

"Hallo! Where are you off to?" asked the Caterpillar.

But the juniors did not stay to enlighten him. They rushed away in search of the spoof Mr. Mobbs. Now that the real Simon Pure had returned, it was necessary for Wibley of the Remove to get off the scene at once.

Harry Wharton looked into Ponsonby's study.

"Is he here?" he exclaimed.

"Who?" growled Ponsonby.

"Mr. Mobbs."

"No, he isn't."

Wharton ran on. The Removites looked up and down the passages, but there was no sign of the spoof Mr. Mobbs. They ran out into the quadrangle again. But still Wibley of the Remove was not to be seen.

"He's hiding somewhere," muttered Squiff. "He must have spotted Mobby coming in, and cleared off."

"I've looked in Mobby's study," said Johnny Bull. "Wib's not there."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's the real article again."

Mr. Mobbs appeared, with the Head. Dr. Voysey was looking astonished, and was very angry. Mr. Mobbs's strange tale had utterly taken him aback. The news that an impostor, closely resembling Mr. Mobbs, had taken the Form-master's place at Highcliffe that day, was quite unnerving. Dr. Voysey suspected some nefarious design upon the school silver. The whole house was soon in a buzz of excitement as the news spread. Ponsonby & Co. heard it, and gasped with astonishment.

"Not the real Mobby?" exclaimed Ponsonby, when Smithson brought the startling news. "Gammon!"

"Mobby himself says so," said Smithson. "It beats the band, don't it! But you can hear him say so himself."

The nuts rushed away to see Mobby. They found Mr. Mobbs in the quadrangle, quivering with excitement.

"Close the gates!" Mr. Mobbs was shouting. "Keep watch on all sides! The villain must be still about the premises. He must be seized. Doubtless he has filled his pockets with valuables. It is a plot. Lock the gates!"

"Mr. Mobbs!" yelled Ponsonby. "W-w-w-wasn't it you?"

"My dear Ponsonby—"

That reply was convincing. Mr. Mobbs was his old load-eating self again, and Pon was once more his dear Ponsonby. The dandy of Highcliffe realised that the story of the impersonation, astounding as it was, was true. He breathed a deep, deep sigh of relief. That career of reform his Form-master had started upon was not to be continued, then. The nuts of Highcliffe would be once more in clover.

"But—but he was exactly like you, sir," gasped Gadsby. "We never saw any difference. He was a beast, sir! He thrashed Pen—"

"He caned us all!" howled Monson.

"And detained us!" shouted Drury.

"The brutal ruffian!" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs. "So you have suffered at his hands, as well as myself, my dear boys. But he will be punished. He cannot escape. He is hidden somewhere about the building. Search for him!"

"What-ho!" said the nuts in chorus.

They burned to distinguish themselves by the capture of the impostor. It was a chance of getting their own back.

Up and down and round about the Highcliffians searched. The gates had been locked, and the porter was on guard there. Meanwhile, Harry Wharton & Co. joined in the search, though with a different object in view. They were very anxious for Wibley. But Wibley had vanished. The spoof Mr. Mobbs was not to be discovered.

"Amazin' happenin'," yawned the Caterpillar. "Fairly knocks a chap, doesn't it? But I'm fed up. Let's go and have tea, Franky."

"Better help to find the rotter," said Courtenay.

"Remember our guests, dear boy! It's past tea-time."

"Oh, we're helping!" said Harry Wharton.

"Well, I'm tired—exhausted, in fact. I'll go and get tea," said the Caterpillar generously. "You fellows come along when you're fed up. I'm fed up already."

The Caterpillar proceeded to No. 3 Study. He did not find it empty. A junior was seated there in the armchair, casually glancing at a book. The Caterpillar raised his eyebrows a little at the sight of Wibley of the Remove.



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NEXT MONDAY—

"SPORTSMEN ALL!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Hallo," said Wibley calmly.

Wibley was in Etons now, and he did not bear the remotest resemblance to Mr. Mobbs.

His disguise had vanished. Perhaps a spot or two of grease-paint lingered about his ears, but the Caterpillar did not notice it.

"Glad to see you, of course," said the Caterpillar affably. "But I didn't know you were in the little party."

"No?" said Wibley.

"No. I didn't see you with them."

"Well, here I am," said Wibley.

"Quite welcome, dear boy. As you seem to have nothin' to do, you might like the idea of helpin' me to get tea," suggested the Caterpillar.

"Like a bird," said Wibley cheerfully.

They proceeded to get tea. The Caterpillar was a little puzzled at finding Wibley there, but he did not think of connecting him with the mysterious Mr. Mobbs. There was a fragrant scent of cooking in the study, when the door opened and Ponsonby looked in. He took no notice of Wibley.

"Not here?" he asked.

"Eh, what?"

"We're searching all the studies now," explained Ponsonby. "Mobbs's sure the man is still in the school. The whole house is bein' searched from top to bottom. By gad, we'll make him squirm when we get hold of him."

"You can look under the sofa, if you like," said the Caterpillar urbanely; "also in the coal-locker, and down the spout of the teapot."

Ponsonby retired and slammed the door.

"Whom are they looking for?" asked Wibley.

"Man been here impersonatin' Mobbs," explained the Caterpillar. "They suspect he's a burglar."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cacklin' at?"

"Oh, nothing! Hand me the butter, and I'll fry the eggs. Better call the chaps in now; we're ready."

"Yaas."

The Caterpillar proceeded in search of his chums.

"Come on, Franky; tea's ready. Haven't they found the man yet?"

"No," said Courtenay. "He seems to have vanished into thin air. He can't have got away; but he hasn't been found."

"Oh, he'll turn up; but tea can't wait, and he can," urged the Caterpillar. "Our guests must be famished, and there's a rippin' tea ready."

"You've got tea all by yourself?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"No; Wibley helped me."

Bob jumped.

"Who?" he yelled.

"Wibley!"

"WIBLEY?"

"Yaas. He was in my study. Didn't he come over with you?"

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Seems to be pottiness in the air to-day," drawled the Caterpillar, as Bob Cherry rushed away to tell his chums the news. "Has that chap gone off his rocker, too, Franky? Come and have tea. Wibley's done the cooking, so it's all right."

Harry Wharton & Co. joined them in the study, grinning. They looked at Wibley as they came in, and Wibley nodded and smiled.

"All ready?" he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Seems to be a lot of excitement here this afternoon," said Wibley casually. "De Courcy says that a man has been impersonating Mr. Mobbs. Have you fellows seen anything of him?"

The juniors shrieked.

"I don't want to be inquisitive," yawned the Caterpillar. "But would you mind tellin' a chap what the cackle is about?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"By the way, there is a bundle here that ought to be kept out of sight till it can be sent back to Greyfriars," remarked Wibley.

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"A bundle?" said Courtenay.

"Yes—a black frock-coat, and some other things in it," said Wibley—"a beard like Mr. Mobbs's, and bags like his, and collar, and so forth. I've tied it up and put it in the cupboard behind the other things. Of course, you fellows will keep mum."

"But—but I don't understand."

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry, almost weeping. "Don't you understand? It was a jape on Mobbs and the nuts—it was Wibley all the time!"

"Wibley?"

"Yes, rather!"

"The Wiblefulness was terrific!" grinned Hurree Singh. "But the fat would have been in the esteemed fire if the catchfulness had come off."

"Oh, my word!" said the Caterpillar. "What a thumping wheeze! And—and I never guessed. I've been taken in in my old age, by gad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it gave me a shock when I saw Mobbs coming in," murmured Wibley. "There was no getting out, you see. Retreat cut off. So I buzzed into this study and locked the door. I thought you fellows wouldn't mind my using it as a dressing-room under the circumstances—"

"Delighted, dear boy!"

"And whipped off my Mobbs rig and put it in a bundle," said Wibley. "I've used somebody's cambric handkerchiefs to clean my chivvy—"

"Mine, by gad!"

"They'll wash, you know. I hadn't any time to waste. Luckily, there was some water in the kettle, and a jam-jar to pour it into. It took me ten minutes to get rid of my rig and become myself again," said Wibley. "It was a jolly narrow escape. If I'd tried to bolt, I should have been nailed. But it's all serene now—so long as you fellows keep mum."

Courtenay wiped his eyes.

"We'll keep mum, of course," he said. "Blessed if I had a single suspicion. You ought to be on the stage, you boulder!"

"I'm going there some day," said Wibley cheerfully. "This is by way of keeping my hand in, you know. I fancy we've given Pon & Co. as good as they gave us now. We had a licking at Greyfriars, and they've had some lickings here—from Mobbs the Second!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

No. 3 Study rang with laughter. The party sat down to a merry tea at what time the search for the impersonator of Mr. Mobbs was still going on, high and low, from one end of Highcliffe to the other.

After tea the chums of Greyfriars took their departure, Wibley going with the party, and Courtenay and the Caterpillar seeing them off at the gates. Ponsonby & Co. saw them go; but they little dreamed that in the Greyfriars party went the mysterious "Mr. Mobbs" for whom they were still searching.

That mysterious Mr. Mobbs was never discovered.

Indeed, so utterly had he vanished, and so completely did the search for the kidnapping gang fail, that many fellows suspected that Mr. Mobbs had not been impersonated or kidnapped at all, but that he had suffered from delusions and imagined the whole business.

Courtenay and the Caterpillar, of course, said no word; and, needless to say, Harry Wharton & Co. kept their own counsel. The Head of Greyfriars would certainly not have looked at the matter as they did, and his sense of humour would have failed him in appreciating that tremendous jape. The chums of the Remove chuckled over their success in strict privacy. The jape had been a triumph all along the line, and the only drawback was that they could not tell Ponsonby & Co. the true identity of the Mysterious Mr. Mobbs.

THE END

"SPORTSMEN ALL!"

is the title of next Monday's grand school story, introducing Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's, Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood, and Frank Courtenay & Co. of Highcliffe. ORDER NOW!

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Dick Damer, an orphan, is invited by his uncle out to Australia. On arriving he hears of his uncle's death, from a man named Wesley Crane.

Wesley Crane, for some sinister purpose, has Dick drugged and smuggled aboard the Rainbow, a small schooner commanded by Captain Cripps.

The Rainbow sights a derelict. Captain Cripps and Dick, going aboard the vessel, find a youth, who is overpowered by gas fumes, has been left aboard her.

Dick and the youth, Barry Freeland, reach the Rainbow safely; but Captain Cripps, staying longer on the derelict, is apparently drowned, owing to a storm rising, which causes the vessel to founder.

Barry Freeland takes charge of the Rainbow, and, finding some papers relating to pearls on a mysterious island, decides to go in search of the treasure, which rightfully belongs to Dick.

On reaching the island, however, they find the pearls have been stolen.

While on the way to the Solomon Islands in search of Burke, a notorious scoundrel, who has visited the mysterious island and stolen the pearls, the comrades on the Rainbow pick up three of his colleagues, and one of them, Barstow, helps the comrades to recover the pearls, which have been hidden on the island San Cristobal.

Dick hides the pearls in a sandy cove on the seashore; but the comrades then fall into the hands of Burke and his gang, and are imprisoned in an underground cave.

Having blockaded the door of the prison, they seek means of escape.

Barry, seeing a hole high up in the wall, climbs up to it; and, finding that it overlooks the bay, horrifies Dick by declaring that he intends to dive into the shark-infested waters in an effort to escape.

(Now go on with the story.)

Barry's Dive for Freedom.

"Don't, Barry—don't try it!" begged Dick. "It's a terrible height to dive; and you can't be sure about the sharks. And—and, Barry, I couldn't stand it to see you taken by one of those brutes."

Barry stared at Dick. There was a queer look in his face. "Why, bless the chap, he's got tears in his eyes!" he muttered.

"It's all right, Dick," he said, in a softer voice than Dick had ever heard him use. "Honestly, there's less risk from the sharks than from the chance of Burke's folk being on the look out from above. You ask Barstow if you don't believe me. Here, get down a minute, and hear what Barstow says."

"I reckon you're right, Cap'n Freeland," said Barstow, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 389.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"SPORTSMEN ALL!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry
Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

when he had heard Barry's proposal. "There won't be no sharks along the cliff when there's a free feed for 'em out in the middle. It's right smart of a dive, though," he added.

"That's nothing," Barry answered quickly. "I've been off as big a height before, and there's plenty of water right under the foot o' the cliff."

"What's your notion, then?" asked Barstow. "Do you reckon to get back to the boat?"

"No, too far. I'd have to swim right round that head-land to the left. My idea is to get across to the spit on the right, and cross over and get out to the Brant. D'ye know if there's a boat alongside her?"

"I reckon there is. Burke keeps one ashore, and there's two at the schooner."

"That's all right. Then I'll take one of those, and pull right back to the Rainbow, collect all hands, and come right back, and take Burke's crowd from the rear."

Barstow looked doubtful.

"Sounds all right, but what about them seeing you from the shore? Burke's a right smart shot with a rifle. He'll be mighty likely to spot you afore you can get out o' range."

"I've got to take the chances," replied Barry impatiently. "Anything's better than sticking here and starving, or—"

His sentence was cut short by a thunderous clang which echoed through the cave.

"Guess that's Burke a-calling us to breakfast!" remarked Barstow, in his dry way.

"Well, if he's there he won't be on top of the cliff," said Barry quickly. "Here's my chance!"

As he spoke, he was unlacing his boots, and next moment he had flung them off, and was clambering back into the opening.

Dick followed. As he did so, the whole cave resounded with sledge-hammer blows upon the stone door.

Barry turned to him with a grin.

"Keeps 'em good and busy, eh, Dick? So much the better for me."

Dick tried to smile back, but failed.

"It's a terribly long drop, Barry," he said, as he glanced down at the quiet blue water lying so far beneath.

"That's nothing," declared Barry emphatically. "I've dived that high lots of times. Cheer up, Dick! I'll get through all right."

He gave Dick his hand, and Dick wrung it speechlessly.

Barry rose to his full height. He was wearing nothing but blue jean trousers and a thin undervest. The sunlight falling upon him showed the great muscles that rippled easily in his back and shoulders.

At the last moment he turned once more to Dick.

"It's likely I'll be some time before I can get back," he said quickly. "If Burke gets hold of you, and starts any dirty games, I give you free leave to tell him where the pearls are. I'd a darned sight lose them than you, old son!"

"So-long!" he ended, and, raising his arms above his head, gathered himself and sprang outwards.

Dick breathlessly watched him shoot head-downwards through the brilliant sunlight. He saw him strike the water clean as a dropping arrow, and vanish in a tiny cloud of spray.

From the force of his long fall it seemed to Dick as though Barry must go clean to the bottom, yet it was only a matter of a few seconds before his chestnut-red head reappeared on the surface. He turned, treading water, and waved his hand to Dick, then started off swimming at such

a pace that he left a wake of transparent foam bubbling behind him.

The pounding from up the passage was deafening in its clangour, but Dick paid no attention. With his heart in his mouth he stood watching Barry drive onwards along the base of the cliff towards the mangrove spit.

Nothing touched him, and within little more than five minutes from the time he had dived, he waded ashore. Once more he turned, and waved a hand to Dick. Then he plunged into the gloomy depths of the swamp, and disappeared from view.

"He's safe!" said Dick, turning to Barstow.

"I'm real glad o' that!" Barstow answered, with more feeling than he usually displayed. "He's a white man is Freeland. But say, Mr. Damer, sounds to me like Burke won't be long before he gets that there door down. And he ain't going to be pleased when he finds Freeland gone."

Dick considered a moment.

"Tell you what, why shouldn't he find us all gone?"

Barstow shook his head.

"Guess I'd break my back if I tried that there jump!"

"I don't mean that," Dick said quickly. "I couldn't do that dive myself. What I mean is, let's hide. When we were looking for a way out last night I spotted a deepish sort of hole in one side of the passage. The mouth is hidden by a screen of stalactite. There's room for us all three to lie up there, and I'll bet they'll be some time finding us!"

"I guess it's good enough to try," Barstow answered. "It's time that counts now, for even if Freeland gets through it's going to be three or four hours afore he can get back with help."

"Come on, then," said Dick. "I'll show you the way."

The rest had done Barstow's ankle good, and with Dick on one side and Chang on the other, he managed to hobble up the passage. Dick led him straight to his hiding-place, and they stowed themselves away in the darksome niche behind the stalactites.

By this time the pounding had stopped. But in the quiet of the cave they could hear a low, grating sound.

"Guess Burke's putting a charge in," remarked Barstow, in a low voice.

Then for a long time no one spoke, and the silence was broken only by the grating of the drill. This stopped, and was followed by a tapping sound.

"They're stamping home the charge!" whispered Barstow.

"Look out for squalls when they looses her off!"

"What do you mean?" asked Dick.

"Roof falls," replied Barstow briefly. "I used to work underground in Queensland. I've seed a dynamite cartridge bring down the whole of a cavern afore now."

The tapping ceased, and for a while there was utter silence. The three crouching in their narrow refuge hardly breathed. Even Chang seemed to be affected by the atmosphere of suspense.

"She's about due!" said Barstow at last.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before there came a tremendous thud. The air rushed back in a wave

that almost stunned them. It was as if a giant had struck the cliff-top above them with a thousand-ton hammer.

The solid rock quivered, then before the first sound had died, it was followed by a long, reverberating crash, and the whole air was thick with dust.

"Guess that charge was a mite too heavy!" muttered Barstow in Dick's ear. "It's busted the roof, jest as I told you!"

Club Against Spear.

The air was so thick they could hardly breathe, and for many seconds the cracking, splitting sounds continued. The explosion had shaken the whole cave, and every moment some fresh mass of stalactite, loosened by the shock, would come clanging down from the roof to the stony floor below.

Several pieces dropped close to where the three lay crouched on their shelf, but, fortunately, none large enough to do harm, and by degrees the uproar died away, and all was still.

Through the dusty darkness a light glowed redly, and there came a sound of steps. Dick pinched Barstow's arm.

"Lie low," he whispered—"lie low, and they won't see us in this smother!"

The steps came closer.

"I told you the charge was too heavy, Pyke. A nice mess you've made of it! The chances are that you have wiped them all out!"

The voice was that of Wigram.

They heard Burke's oily chuckle.

"A case of the pot calling the kettle black," he observed. "My good Wigram, you and Pyke are always so impulsive. The effect of the explosion will have spent itself long before reaching the outer cave. I do not imagine that our friends have taken any harm."

Dick felt Barstow quiver with a soundless chuckle.

"Burke's right that time, but I guess he'd be a whole lot surprised if he knowed we was here a-listening to what he's saying," he whispered in Dick's ear.

The steps passed on, and the crimson torch-glow died away down the slope running towards the sea cave.

"Now," muttered Dick—"now's our chance! Let's get out before they come back."

"Chances are the opening's guarded," Barstow replied. "Burke's too 'cute to run any chances."

"Then it'll be only niggers," was Dick's answer. "And they won't have firearms."

"They'll have their nasty great spears," objected Barstow. "And we ain't heeled at all."

"We'll use rocks, fists—anything! We must rush them! Anything's better than waiting here for Burke to find us. You said yourself last night you'd rather crawl across the island than fall into Wigram's hands."

"Ay, I did! Come on, then. May as well die scrapping as any other way!"

"But I wish to blazes I had two sound legs!" he groaned, as Dick helped him down off the rock shelf.

Dick dared not use his lamp, and they stumbled among piles of fallen rock and stalactite. Fortunately, it was not very far to the mouth, and soon they caught the welcome gleam of daylight.

Dick stooped, and picked up a two-foot length of hard, white rock, which looked like an icicle turned to stone. Chang, silent as usual, followed his example.

They had Barstow between them, each holding him under one arm, and he contrived to hobble along. But it was slow work, and Dick was in an agony of impatience. Every moment he expected to hear Burke and the others coming back from their fruitless search. If there had only been a little time to spare, they might have tried to block the passage with some of the broken stone, but that was out of the question.

Near the entrance Barstow signed to them to stop.

"You leave me right here," he whispered. "Guess you'll need all your hands to tackle them niggers."

Dick nodded, and leaving Barstow propped against one wall of the passage, he and Chang crept soundlessly forward. Dick's heart was pounding, and he grasped his stone club with desperate energy.

He reached the opening, paused a moment listening, but heard nothing, and presently ventured to peer cautiously around the corner.

There was no sign of life, and, after waiting a few seconds, he walked out into the open.

"Me junkum all gone inside," said Chang.

"There's no one here, anyhow," replied Dick quickly, and hurried back to Barstow.

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"That's mighty odd," remarked Barstow, frowning in puzzled fashion. "Almost looks like as if Burke was wanting us to get away."

In spite of his anxiety, Dick nearly laughed. Such an idea was too preposterous. Then his quick ears caught a sound from somewhere far down the tunnel.

"He'll have us in about two twos if we don't hurry up!" he said sharply. "Take my arm and come on!"

The jungle path outside was hot as a furnace. There was no breeze, and the sun beat down through the branches with a scorching glare. Never in his life had Dick felt such a temperature.

As they hurried along fast as Barstow could hobble Dick looked anxiously from side to side. He was searching for some side-path, into which they might dodge and hide. But the bush was like a wall. A rabbit could hardly have squeezed its way into the terrific tangle of cane and creepers.

Dick felt like a person in a nightmare who is trying to run away from some awful danger, and finds himself chained to the ground. Alone, he and Chang could have raced away, and made sure of safety. But Barstow's best pace was not more than three miles an hour, and every moment Dick expected to hear a shot or a yell.

None came, and, dripping at every pore, they struggled into the clearing where the huts were.

"Me velly thilsty," said Chang.

"Thirsty! I'm dying for a drink!" answered Dick. "See here, Barstow, those huts are empty. Let's try for some water and food. For all we know, we may get stuck up in the bush all day before Barry gets back, and if we've nothing to eat, we shall be simply done for!"

"Right you are, partner! You and Chang go ahead. I'll find a stick and hobble across into the woods t'other side.

We're bound to have them niggers after us before long. I guess they can track mighty nigh as well as the black fellows over in Queensland."

"Come on, Chang!" said Dick.

And he and the Chinaman made a rush for the nearest hut.

As they reached it a man sprang out of the low, arched entrance. He was a native. A short, stocky, powerful-looking brute, and black as the ace of spades. He had a face more like a monkey than a man, and his clothes were a narrow waistband and nothing else. The lobes of his ears hung down on his shoulders, a copper cartridge-case decorated one and a clay pipe the other. He was about as repulsive a specimen of humanity as Dick had ever set eyes on, and, to add to his other attractions, he carried a long spear with an ironwood handle and a point toothed like a saw.

For one second he stood glaring at Dick with little beadlike eyes. Then, without a sound, he charged at him. Dick sprang aside, but the native was as quick as a wild-cat, and swerved after him. He would have got him, too, but for Chang. The Chinaman was a little behind Dick, and as

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the man ran at Dick he lifted his stone club and hurled it at him with all his force.

The club caught the nigger full in the chest, and bowled him over like a ninepin. Before Dick had recovered from his surprise Chang had rushed forward, picked up his club, and finished the wretched native with one tremendous blow over the head.

Although Dick had done his share in the previous day's fighting, this was the first time that he had seen a man killed at close quarters, and for a moment he felt sick and shaken.

But there was no time to think. Chang was already at the hut door, and Dick followed.

Chang merely put his head in, and was out again.

"Dis no use, boss. Him nigger hut."

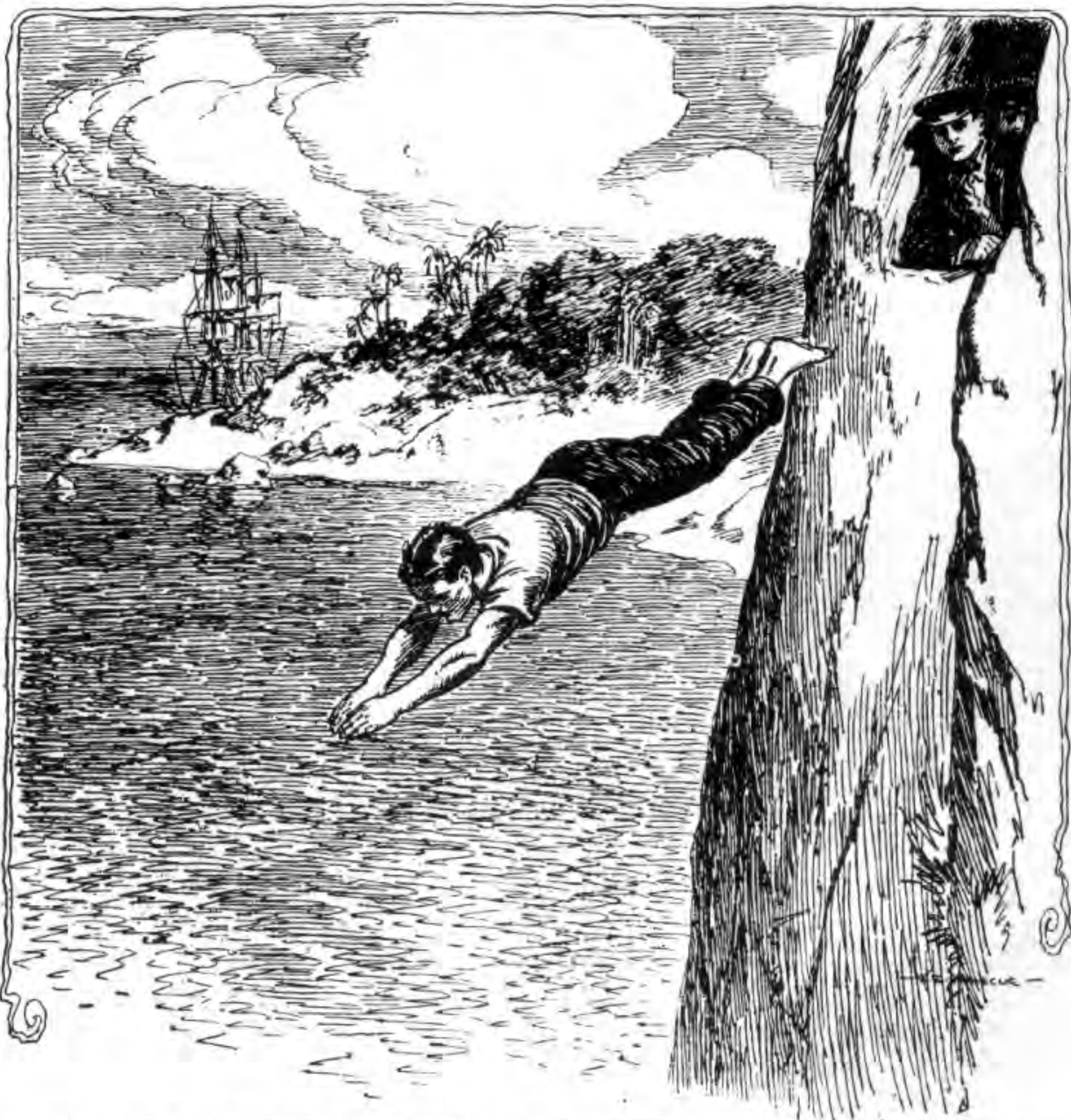
"The big one's Burke's."

It was Barstow's voice from behind.

Dick dashed in. There was an upturned packing-case in the middle, and on it the remains of a meal—biscuits and corned beef. The latter had just been turned out of a tin, and was untouched. Dick crammed it into one pocket, and filled the other with biscuits. He looked round for a gun, but saw none.

"They're coming; I hear 'em!" hissed Barstow from outside.

Dick did not waste another moment. He made a rush for the open, he and Chang caught hold of Barstow, and, lifting him clean off his feet, rushed him into the bush opposite. They found a trail of some sort, and plunged along it frantically, nor did they stop until they were so done up that



"So-long!" said Barry, and raising his arms above his head, he took a deep breath and sprang outwards. Dick breathlessly watched him shoot head-downwards into the shark-infested waters. (See page 23.)

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"SPORTSMEN ALL!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry
Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

they were forced to pull up and lean, panting and dripping, against the trunk of a gigantic tree.

They listened keenly, but could hear nothing.

"We've dodged them," said Dick.

But Barstow shook his head.

"Don't think it! So long as they've got niggers they can run us down any time they want to."

"Then the only thing is to get to the boat," said Dick firmly. "They can't track us once we're afloat."

Barstow shrugged his shoulders.

"May as well try that as anything else. But I don't reckon they've left any bottom in the boat, and if they have it's the first place they'll go to. Ye see, they knows I'm lame."

"It's our only chance," said Dick doggedly. "And, anyhow, it will take us across the brook. We must have water, or we shall go under."

That was true enough. They were all three suffering agonies from thirst. The heat was awful, and seemed to grow worse all the time.

"Guess this is the way, then," said Barstow, pointing downhill, and off they started again. Barstow pluckily did his best to help himself along with a stick he had picked up, but his ankle was almost useless, and they had to help him. It was a terribly slow business, for they were off the path and working through a fearful tangle of bush. Every moment Dick expected to hear Burke's natives on the track.

At last they caught the sound of running water, and it spurred them to fresh exertions. Dick could hardly repress a cry of relief as they came out at last on a steep bank with a deep pool at the bottom, and an exquisite little waterfall tumbling in white foam into the head of it.

Next instant they were all in it, waist-deep, lapping the water like dogs, half-crazed with the delight of its exquisite coolness.

"That's a heap better," said Barstow, raising his head with a sigh of relief. "Guess I'll be able to walk right down to the beach after this."

"Guess again, Barstow!" came a voice from above, and Wigram, with a malicious grin on his unpleasant face, stood on the bank, covering them with a pistol in each hand.

Burke Offers Terms.

"There ain't a-going to be no more delays, Cap'n Burke. Me and Pyke has made up our minds to that, and so you needn't to say nothing more!"

It was Wigram speaking, and his words came clearly enough to Dick's ears. Dick at the moment was lying, tied hand and foot, on the floor of one of the huts, and Wigram and Burke and Pyke, so far as he could make out, were in the next hut. Barstow and Chang, he believed, were in another hut, but whether they were together, or why he had been separated from them, were questions for which he had, at present, no answer.

"You mean, my good Wigram," answered Burke, in his silkiest tone, "that you and Pyke, being two to one, have resolved to set my authority at defiance? Pray do not be afraid of hurting my feelings!"

"Have it any way you like!" Wigram retorted sulkily. "All I got to say is that Pyke an' me is tired o' this shilly-shallying. We knows as one o' them three has hid the pearls, and if they won't talk—why, we're a-going to open their mouths for 'em, that's all!"

"We're tired of waiting, we are," Pyke put in. "And I'll lay, if any of 'em knows, it's Barstow."

"It may be so." From Burke's tone Dick guessed that he was shrugging his great shoulders. "It may be so. Suppose, now, that you two go and ask him nicely. You might just mention the Pit of Scales to him. If he does happen to know where the pearls are hidden—why, I have little doubt that he will oblige you!"

"But mind," he added sternly, "none of your head-cords or finger-twisting. Barstow is my meat, and I claim to deal with him!"

Wigram growled something under his breath which Dick could not catch. Then, by the sound, the two went out of the hut.

A moment later, and Burke came slipping in through the door of Dick's prison.

For a moment or two he stood looking down at the boy with that grin which to Dick seemed worse than any scowl.

"You're giving me a heap o' trouble, sonny!" he observed.

"The boot's on the other foot!" Dick retorted.

Burke chuckled.

"I like that. Here you come butting in and stealing my property and hiding it, and then you're annoyed because I want it back!"

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"Don't talk nonsense!" said Dick. "The pearls were never yours!"

"I reckon it was me and my crowd fished them up out of the lagoon," Burke answered. "If that don't give me a claim to them I don't know what does!"

Dick did not answer. He felt it was not worth while to argue.

"See here," Burke went on, "I stopped these chaps o' mine from handling you as they wanted to last night. But I can't hold them any longer. They've got that impatient that there's no doing anything with them, and I tell you straight they're going to make things mighty unpleasant for you if you don't own up where you planted the pearls!"

He paused a moment, and seemed to listen. Then, lowering his voice, he continued:

"I'm no hog, and here's my proposal. You tell me where you planted the pearls, and I'll share 'em up with you, half and half. What's more, I'll give you back your gun and your boat, and start you off safe and sound to your schooner."

Dick pretended to hesitate.

"The pearls are not mine," he said. "I should have to ask Freeland first."

"Freeland's sharks' meat hours ago!" Burke answered curtly, and for once his usual grin was gone from his face.

"How do you know?" demanded Dick, in sudden panic.

"Never you mind how I know. It's a fact, anyhow."

Dick gasped. For once it seemed as though Burke were speaking the truth. It occurred to him that Burke might have spotted Barry from the window of the cave and shot him as he rowed back to the Rainbow.

"There's no hope from Freeland, if that's what you're counting on," continued Burke; "and as pearls are no use to him where he's gone, it's up to you to accept my offer."

Dick's lips set.

"I'll see you sharks' meat first!" he said deliberately.

Burke's face darkened ominously. For a moment Dick fully expected a blow or a kick. But the man controlled himself.

"I'd the notion you'd got more sense," he said, with a bitter sneer. "Well, I guess you'll change your mind before a great while. The mere look of that pit is a mighty fine persuader."

He turned and went out, leaving Dick in a state of mind better imagined than described.

If Barry was really gone, all hope of rescue was at an end. There was nothing left but to face the end with as much pluck as was left to him.

He had not long to wait. In less than five minutes Pyke and Wigram came in.

Wigram jerked him roughly to his feet.

"So Burke couldn't make you speak—eh? I'll lay a pearl to a penny you'll squeal afore I'm done with ye!"

He roped Dick's hands behind his back and drove him out of the hut. Outside, Barstow and Chang stood in charge of a couple of unpleasant-looking natives. Then all three were marched off down a narrow path which led through the scrub in a direction exactly opposite to the path leading to the brook.

As before, the unfortunate Chang was made to carry Barstow on his back. How he managed it Dick did not know, for if the heat had been scorching earlier in the day it was now positively terrific.

A faint mutter of thunder shook the sullen air.

"Guess we'll have a shower," Dick heard Pyke say to Wigram.

"Good job, too! It's hot enough to boil a man's brains!" growled Wigram.

The path dropped steeply. The bush on either side was a solid wall. The ground underfoot became wet and greasy.

Dick slipped several times, and Chang fell twice. Each time he was cursed and thrashed to his feet again. Chang did not speak, but Dick saw a gleam in his dark eyes which boded ill for his tormentors if he ever got his hands on them.

Just as Dick had begun to wonder if this horrible path was ever coming to an end he caught a glimpse of daylight, and next minute the path ended in an open space.

It was a sort of marshy glade, surrounded by heavy bush, and in the centre was a black, sullen-looking pool, with banks of slimy mud sloping steeply to the oily water.

Burke turned to Dick.

"Come along with me, sonny," he said. "I've got something pretty to show you."

He led Dick forward to the very edge of the pool, and now Dick saw floating among the thick scum which covered the foul and stagnant surface a number of objects which looked like trunks of dead trees.

"Now, you just stand there, my lad," said Burke, and,



As the native rushed at Dick, Chang lifted his stone club and hurled it at him with all his force. The club caught the nigger full in the chest, and bowled him over like a ninepin. Before Dick had recovered from his surprise the Chinaman rushed forward and secured his victim. (See page 25.)

turning, said something in a language Dick did not understand to one of the natives who accompanied the party.

The man came forward, grinning evilly. His front teeth had been filed to sharp points, which made his grin the most hideous thing imaginable.

This man handed to Burke a large chunk of raw meat which he had been carrying, and Burke took it, swung it, and sent it flying out over the pool. It fell with a sullen splash far out in the dark water.

Instantly the dead trunks took life, and with one accord shot through the water with the speed of torpedoes, making for the spot where the meat had fallen.

The scummy water rolled in greasy ripples, and the heavy air became thick with a sickening odour of musk.

Next instant half a dozen of the monsters met around the meat, and as many pairs of yard-long jaws clashed like great traps as their scale-clad owners fought savagely for the morsel.

"Pretty pets, ain't they?" chuckled Wigram, as he watched the hideous conflict. "Pity there ain't enough meat to go round!"

Dick hardly heard. It was the first time that he had ever seen crocodiles, and the horror of these monstrous, scale-clad lizards held him spellbound.

Burke's fingers closed vicelike on his arm.

"What d'yo think of 'em, sonny? Nice spot for a swim on a warm afternoon like this!" he purred in Dick's ear.

Dick stared at him in a vague sort of way.

"Want me to make it plainer?" grinned Burke. "Got to THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 389.

explain in so many words. All right, sonny! It's you for the swim if you don't tell us where you've hid the pearls!"

At last Dick understood, and his very flesh crawled, while, in spite of the awful heat, he shivered till his teeth chattered.

"Told you he wouldn't stick it," he heard Wigram say to Pyke.

The contempt in the man's tone stung him. He set his teeth.

"All right. Chuck me in if you like!" he answered fiercely. "It won't help you to the pearls. That's one thing sure."

There came an ugly gleam in Burke's small eyes.

"We will see if your opinion is the same after you have seen these pretty creatures make a meal of one of your friends. Wigram, conduct Mister Barstow to the edge of the pit. Keep the rope on him, and don't let him go till I give the word."

Without a moment's delay Barstow was driven forward to the edge of the horrible place. It seemed that the monsters beneath realised what was being prepared for them. One by one they came gliding across through the iridescent scum until, below the black slime of the bank, there lay a long array of gnarled heads and green, unwinking eyes set under rims of horn.

The horror of the sight turned Dick sick. In spite of all his pluck, he shuddered with horror.

"Shall I push him off, cap'n?" asked Wigram.

(Look out for next Monday's instalment of this exciting yarn. Order your "MAGNET" early!)

NEXT
MONDAY—

"SPORTSMEN ALL!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry
Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

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FOR NEXT MONDAY:

"SPORTSMEN ALL!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.

Under this title the popular "Magnet" author has written a really rousing story of school and sport, in which the chums of Greyfriars entertain the chosen men of St. Jim's, Rookwood, and Highcliffe, and compete with them in racing, rowing, shooting, swimming, and many other sports dear to the heart of the British boy. A magnificent silver cup is offered by Lord Eastwood—pater of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's—and it is the burning desire of each school to "bag" the trophy. Up to the very last the interest and excitement are brilliantly sustained, and it is only by a supreme effort that one of the schools wins the coveted cup. The festivities that follow the sports are of a rollicking order, and great good-humour prevails when the toasts are drunk by 'Friars and Saints, Highcliffians and Rookwooders—

"SPORTSMEN ALL!"

A REPTON READER'S REQUEST.

Jimmy R., of Repton, sends me a pathetic ode, which I am publishing on this page. Like Rachel of old, he mourns, and will not be comforted.

But Jimmy has at least this consolation—he can tell all his chums and fellow-mourners that he has actually had one of his poems in print!

Here is my Repton chum's poetic plaint:

A LAMENT FOR THE LOST ONES.

Tell me, Mr. Editor,
If I don't mistake,
Was there not a person
Known as Dicky Rake?
In his early schooldays
He was great, I vow.
Mondays then were full days—
Where's the beggar now?
There was, if I remember,
A chap named Esmond, too,
Who once showed the white feather,
But later turned true blue.
I know you won't be hard on
Your loyal reader, Jim;
But, sir, I beg your pardon—
What's become of him?
And good old Marky Linley,
We seldom hear his name;
When last he saw the limelight
'Twas in "Through Fire and Flame!"
A poor and unpaid poet,
His praises I extol;
He held the field, but, blow it!
Where is he? At the Pole?
In one sublime vacation,
On glorious river trips,
I read the grand adventures
Of schoolboy conjurer Kippa.
The tears of joy did splash me
As down my cheeks they fell;
I loved the chap—but, dash me!
Has he retired as well?
Dear Skipper, I implore ye,
If you'd fight shy of strife,
To get round Franky Richards
To bring them back to life!
The absence of their dealings
The "Magnet" stories mar;
So spare, dear Ed., the feelings
Of your friend JIMMY R.

YOUR
LAST
CHANCE!



I quite see my correspondent's point, and will arrange with Mr. Richards to have stories written reviving some of the old favourites. But it must not be forgotten that Harry Wharton & Co. are the chief heroes in "The Magnet" Library, and it would never do to "crowd out" fellows like Peter Todd and Vernon-Smith. The characters in the popular Greyfriars stories are so numerous that it is impossible to bring everybody into the limelight. But I will do my best.

Jimmy R. seems to have rather a quaint sense of humour, and I am sending him a little of that earthly dross which even poets are not above accepting, as some slight recompense for his efforts to emulate Byron.

I hope to hear from Jimmy R. again whenever he wishes to air another grievance in so classic a style.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Percy Houghton (Accrington).—Wharton and Cherry are each fifteen years of age.

Hazel Simpson (Brisbane).—Very sorry I fell into the error of supposing that you were a boy. The story you mention is out of print, and unobtainable from this office.

W. B. (Australia).—The titles you require are as follows: "Magnet" No. 82, "The Head's Holiday"; No. 180, "A Schoolboy's Cross-roads"; No. 200, "Wingate's Folly."

"A Yorkshire Reader."—I cannot agree with you that the "Magnet" stories want improving. They are as good as ever they were, and most of my chums will gladly bear me out.

J. Baker (East Ham).—Your idea shall receive my careful consideration. Many thanks!

"A True Friend" (Catford).—In reply to your question as to which school mentioned in the companion papers has the finest cricket team, I am inclined to award the honours to Greyfriars, though St. Jim's is not far behind, and Rookwood—when Jimmy Silver captains

the side—is not to be despised. It is an open question who is the best senior boxer at Greyfriars. Both Wingate and Courtney excel in the noble art.

R. Docker (Birmingham).—I am afraid I know of no cure for the ailment you mention.

D. D. (Belfast).—I advise you to give hypnotism a wide berth.

"Mertherian."—You should apply to the Admiralty, London, S.W.

Edmund Peters (Newfoundland).—I cannot say who is the best quarter-mile runner among the Greyfriars juniors. Probably the honour lies between Wharton, Nugent, Cherry, Linley, and Vernon-Smith.

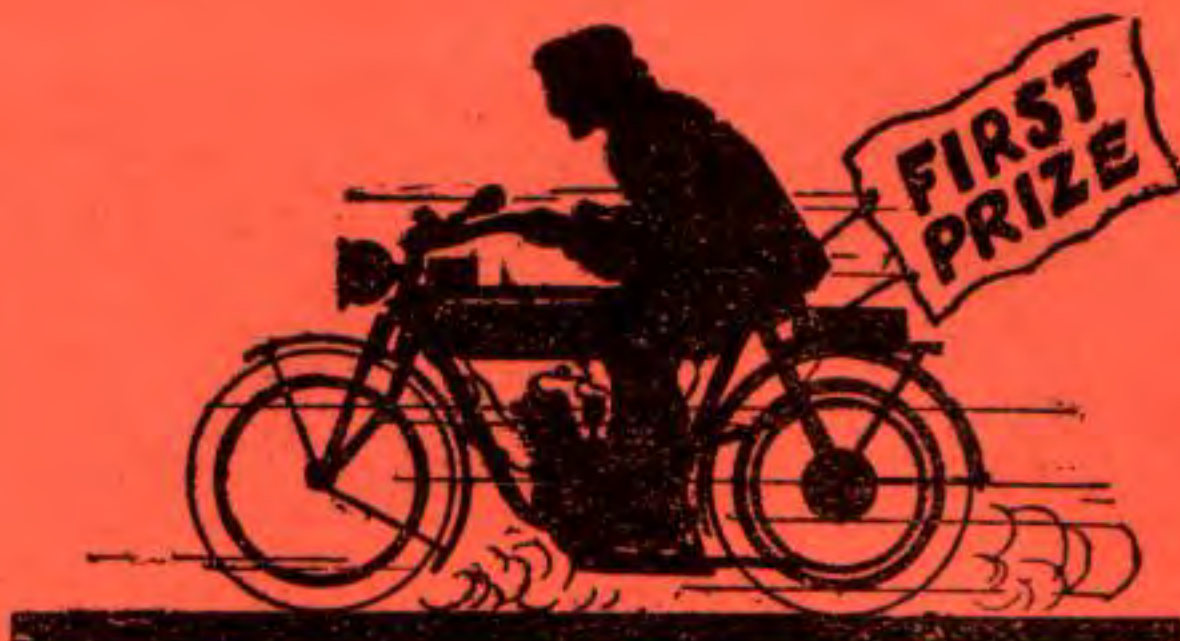
The following loyal chums are also to be warmly commended for their kind letters and suggestions, which I must apologise for not having acknowledged before:

H. Rushton (Ilkley), George Daniels (Battersea), M. B. A. (Winnipeg), G. Coulbeck (Grimsby), "Miss Fluffy" (Earl's Court), R. F. Stephens (Birmingham), "A Lance-Corporal," B. F. (Manchester), "A Faithful Reader" (Southall), "An Aberdeenshire Chum," J. Hayward (Wilts), E. Dobell (Liverpool), "X. Y. Z." (West Calder), A. M. (London, S.E.), S. Wickers (Manchester), W. Broadbent (Huddersfield), R. Wilson (Peterborough), "Office Boy" (Wymondham), Gwendoline Warwick (Brixton), R. C. Headon (Exeter), and "A Girl Reader."

Al. L. L.

**LAST
WEEK!**

(See below.)



This may be YOUR PRIZE.

**LAST
WEEK!**

(See below.)

GREAT NEW COMPETITION

FOR ALL BRITISH BOYS.

*For full particulars
as to sending in your
efforts, etc., see final
rules printed below.*

**5,000
PRIZES**

*For full particulars
as to sending in your
efforts, etc., see final
rules printed below.*

FIRST PRIZE:

A GRAND BRAND-NEW RUDGE-MULTI MOTOR CYCLE.

THE 4,999 OTHER PRIZES CONSIST OF

Rudge-Whitworth Bicycles, Radium Watches, Cameras, Boxing Gloves, Footballs, Fountain Pens, Roller Skates, Pocket Knives, etc., etc., etc.

IMPORTANT NOTICE.—Do Not Miss Reading This!

This is the final week of our great Competition, and all efforts must be sent in, addressed to

5,000 PRIZE COMPETITION,

Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C.,

in time to reach that address by Monday, August 9th.

Lists must be carefully pinned together—not pasted, and must be sent flat, not rolled. They may, however, be folded.

The Coupon below must be signed by each competitor, and must be enclosed in the package containing the competitor's effort.

As those taking part in the Competition are aware, the object of the contest is to introduce THE MAGNET LIBRARY and its companion papers to new readers.

All you have to do is to introduce THE MAGNET LIBRARY, or one of the papers mentioned below, to your chums. Show this copy to them and let them read it. Then get them to sign their names on a sheet of paper, and the readers who send in the largest list of names will win these magnificent prizes. Your chum must place the title of the paper he has read against his own name.

This competition is being run together with our companion papers, "The Gem," "Boys' Friend," "Penny Popular," "Marvel," "Union Jack," "Nelson Lee Library," "Pluck," and "Boys' Realm." It must be understood that this is one Competition, and that the decision of the Editor of the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY" must be accepted as final and binding in all matters concerning the contest. It does not matter which, or how many of the papers you get your chums to read. While one chum is reading the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY," get another to read the "Boys' Friend," and so on.

Don't forget the last day for sending in lists is Monday, August 9th.

SIGN THIS COUPON AND ENCLOSE IT WITH YOUR LIST.

*I enter the 5,000 Prize Competition and agree to accept the decision
of the Editor of the Nelson Lee Library as final and legally binding.*

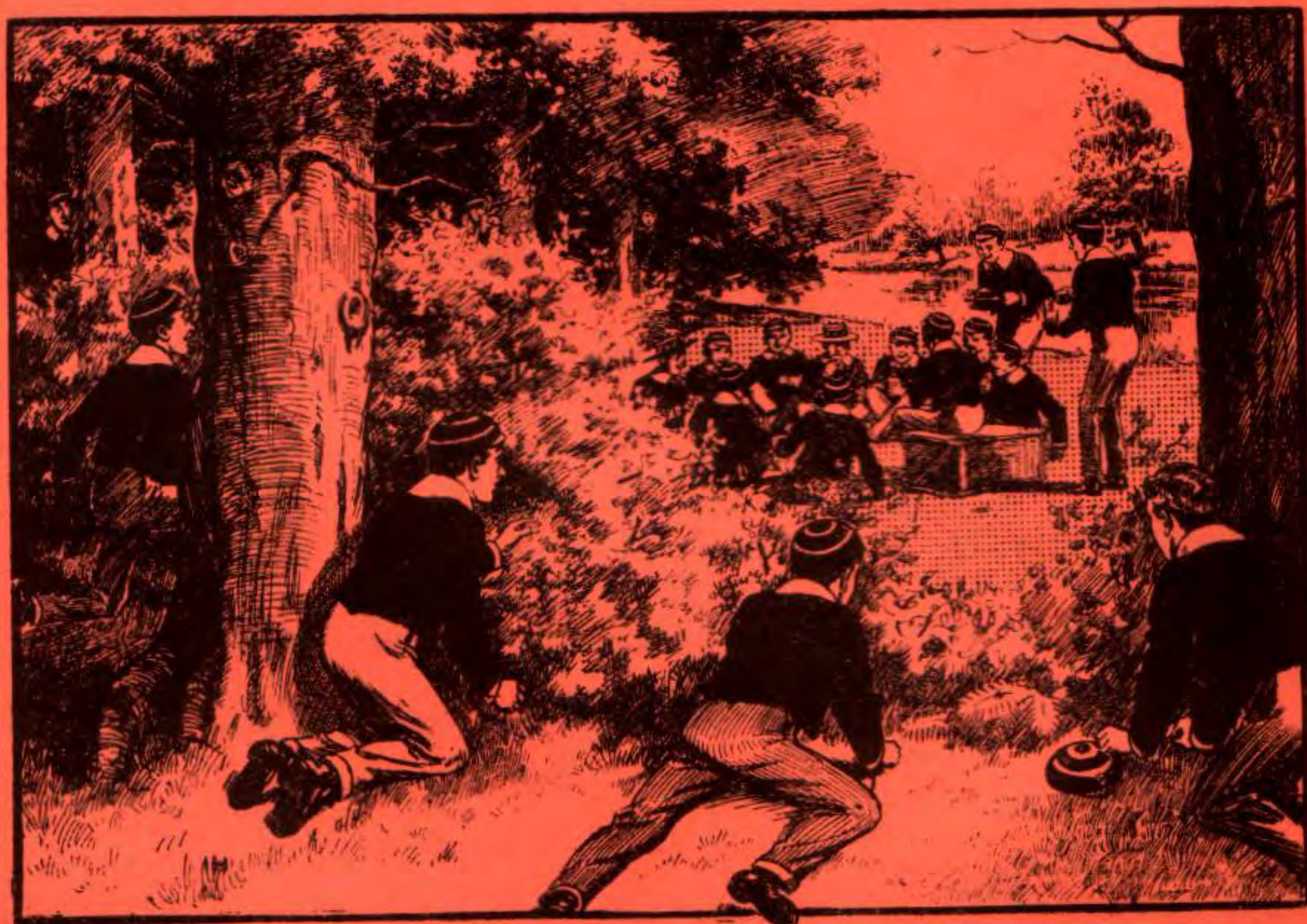
Signed

Address



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